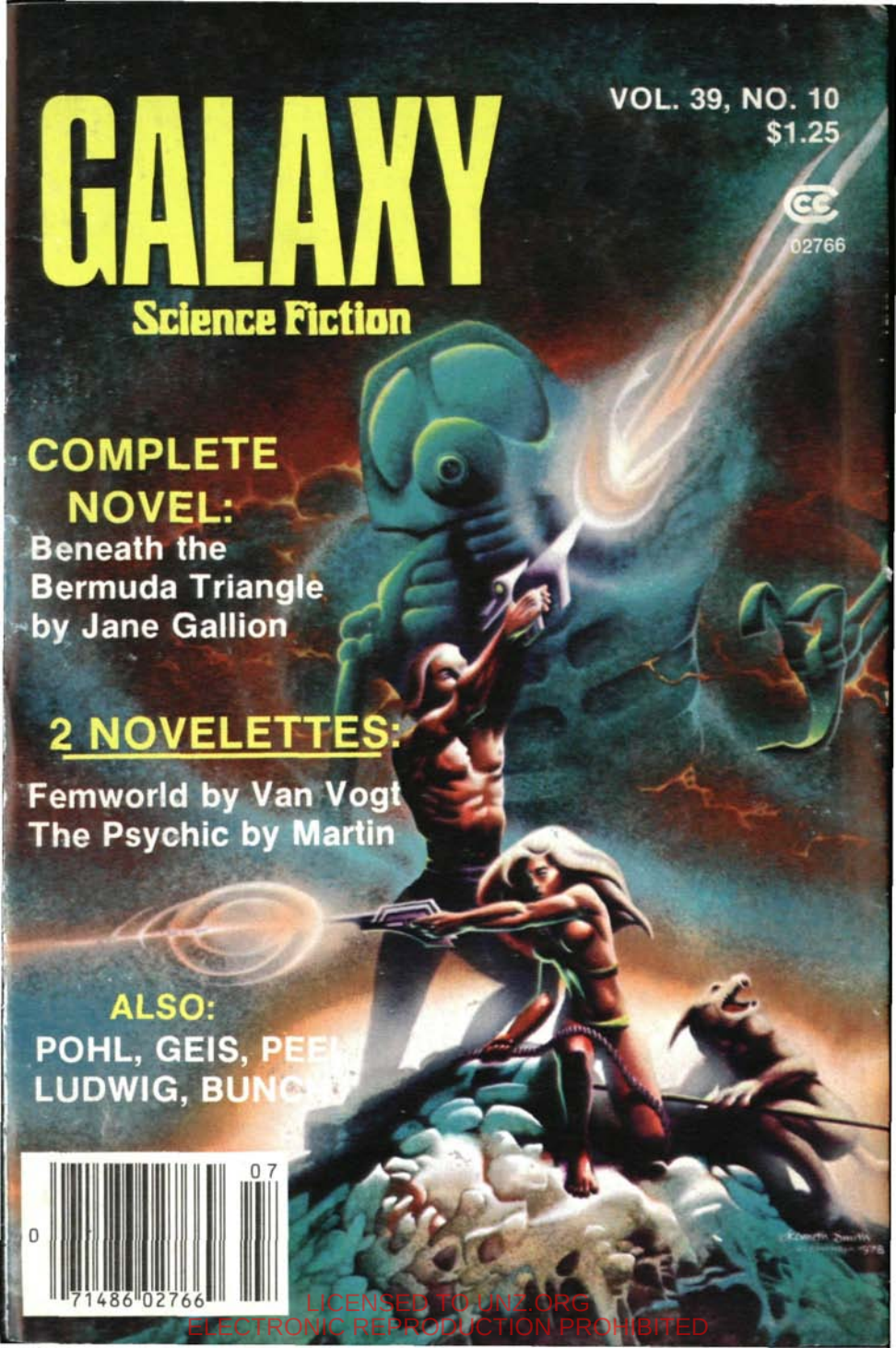

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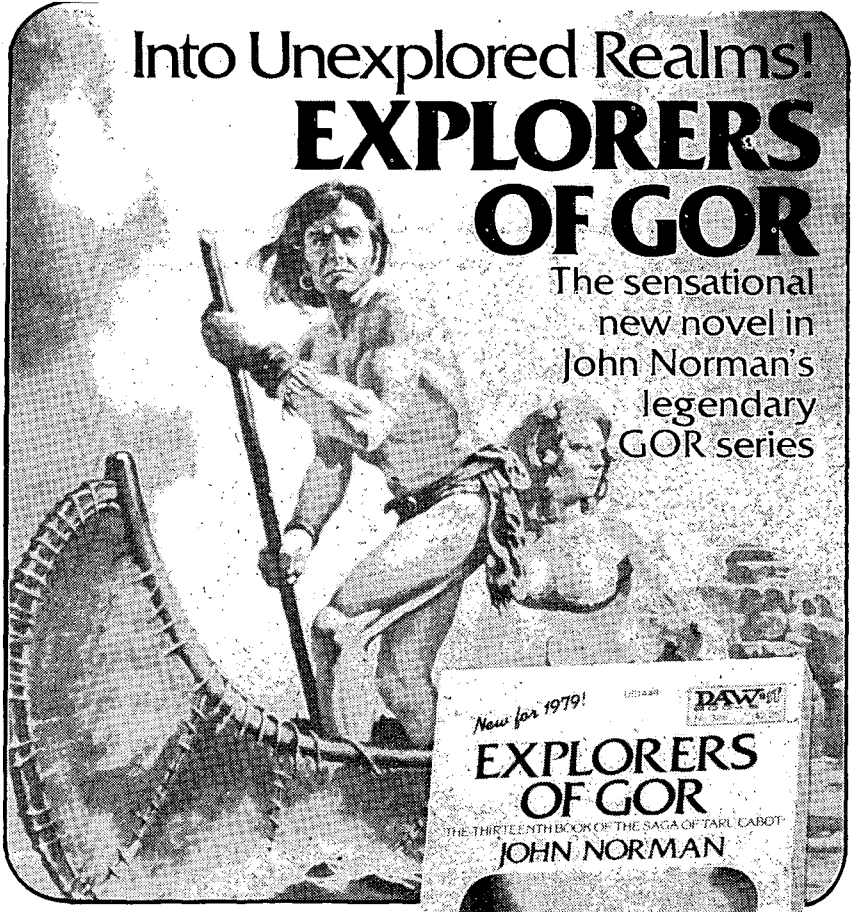

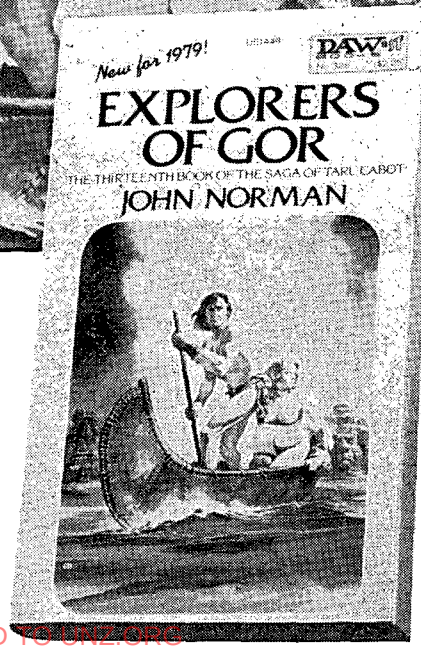

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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

Volume 39, No. 10

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ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

A. E. Van Vogt is no stranger to long-time science fiction fans. The author of such classics as *The World of Null A*, *Slan* and *Voyage of the Space Beagle*, Van Vogt's interest in 21st Century psychologies and philosophies is legendary. His new novel from Pocket Books (a portion of which is previewed in this issue as *Femworld: Before the Revolution*) touches on zoological observations of the behavior of "rogue males" in society and how they might react with some of the more extreme elements of the women's liberation movement who see male aggression as the root cause of most of history's evils.

Jane Gallion, author of this month's headliner, *Beneath the Bermuda Triangle*, has a distinguished literary reputation outside the field for such works as *Stoned* and *The Woman As Nigger*, but cut her teeth on science fiction. Her only published SF novel to date, *Biker*, is a collector's item selling for $50 and more at conventions.

Jesse Peel's first sale was to GALAXY. Since then he has gone on to become a major contributor to our sister magazine IASFM. Known for a more serious, philosophical approach, his *Star Warriors* marks a radical departure for him and a return to the kind of fast-paced, super-charged, high-voltage science fiction entertainment readers have been asking for. A Kung-fu instructor and former medical technician, Mr. Peel lives in Oregon, where he devotes his full time to writing and is currently working on his first SF novel.

Peter Martin is no new-comer either. His first SF story appeared all the way back in the old *Vertex* magazine. Once a member of the infamous West Coast Science Fiction Writer crowd, he now resides in the quieter reaches of West Virginia. *The Psychic*, his debut in GALAXY, begins a series of novelettes that will be appearing here over the next few issues.

David Bunch's "Moderan" stories have been appearing off and on in science fiction magazines for over a decade and a half. In that time they've developed a cult following like the stories of Professor Cordwainer Smith. Like his, they deal with a single continuing backdrop against which exotic activities happen.

Frederik Pohl, of course, needs no introduction to these pages. A former editor of this magazine, he was also one of its earliest and most brilliant contributors. It is fitting that *Jem*, perhaps his greatest book, should be serialized here. A prolific and unusually well-informed SF writer, his career has spanned the whole history of modern science fiction. The author of *The Space Merchants* (a classic satire on the advertising controlled world of the future), *Drunkard's Walk*, and *Stargate*, his current autobiography, *On The Way To The Future*, is a runaway best seller.

Ed Ludwig's subtle blend of SF has been appearing in magazines like *Amazing*, F&SF, IF and GALAXY for over 20 years.

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Hank Stine

EDITORIAL

IF YOU'RE A new reader, welcome aboard!

If you're an old reader, welcome back!

I mention the foregoing because with this issue GALAXY, one of the longest established science fiction magazines, begins to make aggressive new editorial and format changes in an attempt to reach the large market of readers, now interested in SF, who do not normally purchase magazines.

At the same time, in response to letters from loyal followers who have been with GALAXY throughout the years, we are making equally aggressive changes designed to bring back the "golden days" of GALAXY artwork and story.

Many of my ideas of what both kinds of readers want were picked up at the World Science Fiction Convention in Phoenix, from which I recently returned.

It was a spectacular, week-long affair, and every bit up to one's visions of what a *World Science Fiction Convention* ought to be.

Held in an utterly futuristic environment, in the deserted downtown of a modernistic city, it was a gathering of fans and pros that brought everyone together as equals in their love of science fiction for talk, discussion and, occassionally, mutual rancor.

And speaking of the latter, yes, Harlan Ellison was there.

For those of you who might not know, Harlan, one of our greatest living science fiction writers, found himself in what he felt was a difficult position over his Guest of Honorship at the WorldCon.

A man of conscience who came to support the ERA after much soul-searching, Harlan had agreed to GoH prior to the ERA economic boycott of Arizona (a state which has not yet ratified the ERA amendment).

Wishing neither to break the boycott nor shortchange the convention, Harlan took a difficult step which placed the burden directly on himself.

Rather than spend, or have the convention spend in his name, money inside Arizona, Harlan stayed in a camper in 115 degree

(continued on pg. 80)

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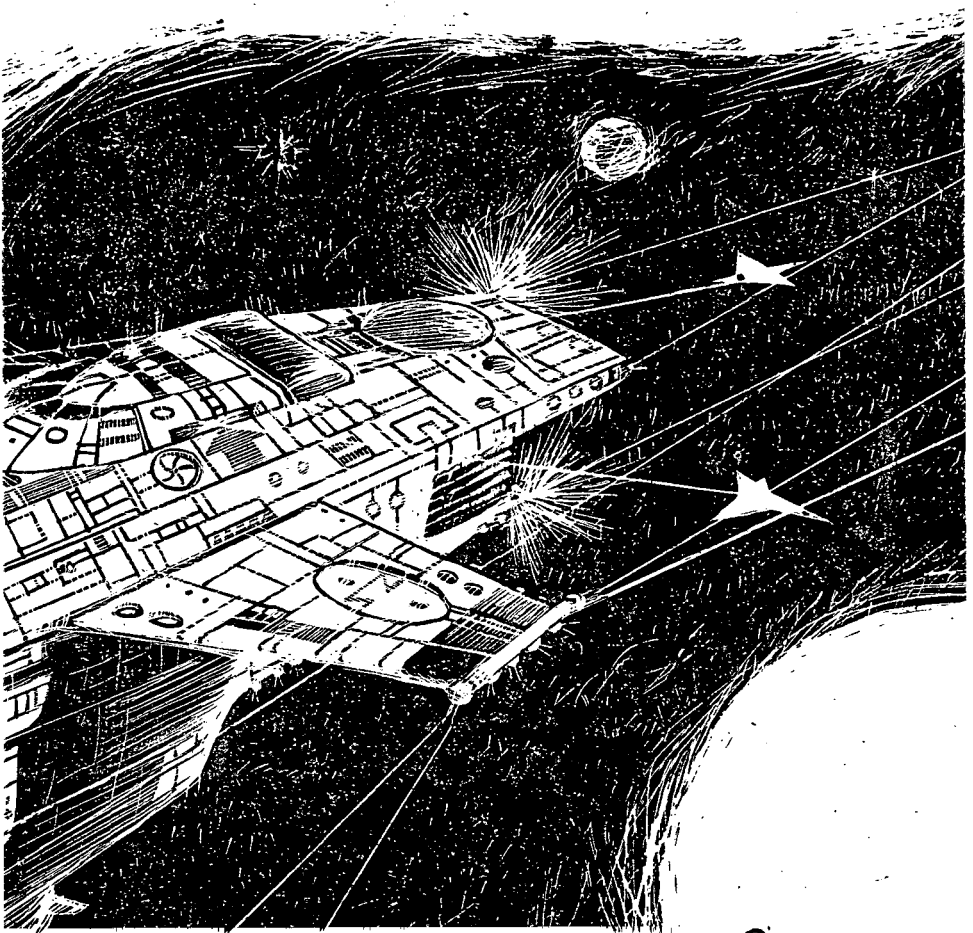
STAR WARRIORS

By Jesse Peele



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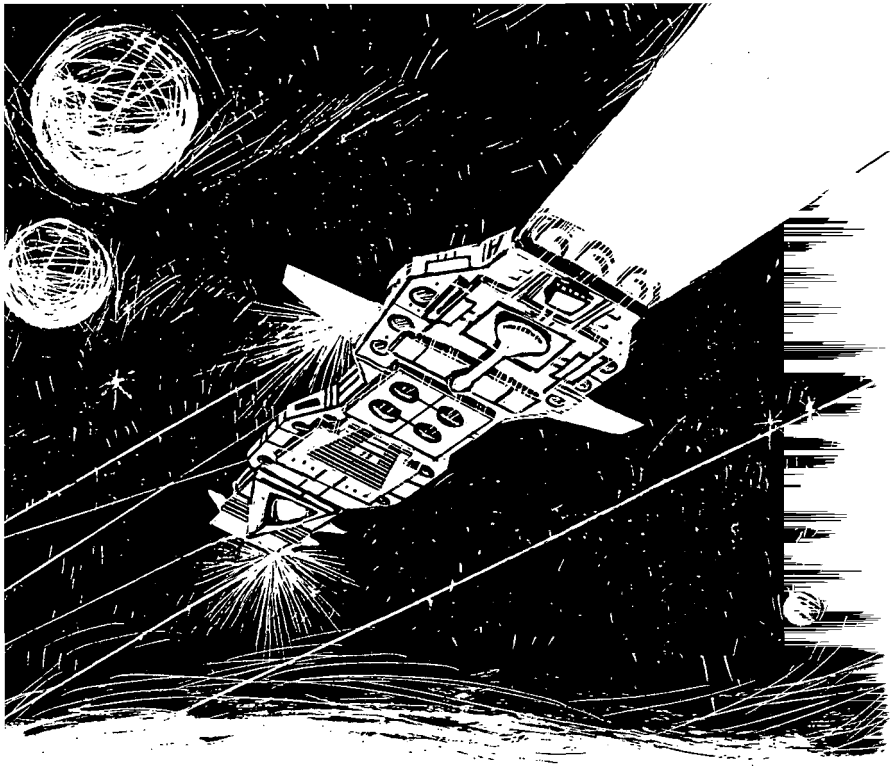

I

THE FABRIC OF REALITY shivered and shimmered blackly, as the silver-blue-and-gleaming disc that was the starship *Starbird* warped back into normal space from hyperdrive. Inside the ship, Dal Harusun touched a heat-sensitive control tab, and the viewer screens blossomed into electronic life.

Under full magnification, the green-and-blue world of Cynthia Dianne misted quickly into focus, only a few million kilometers away

"Nice and peaceful looking, isn't it?" Dal said to Lincheni, who was seated next to him.

Lincheni the Demi-Whelf started to nod his furry head, wolf-like jowls flapping in agreement, when the screens flared into blinding-white light and went black!

"Son-of-a-bitch!" Dal roared. All he could see was blue; two throbbing after-images left by the

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strobed-out screens. Suddenly he heard a sharp crackle from the control board, and then he smelled the acrid tang of burned insulation.

"Damn! What the hell—?"

"We're under attack!" Lincheni said. "And we just blew one of the tertiary reactor circuits!"

The human's vision began to clear just as Lincheni managed to kick in the secondary back-up viewing system—but there was nothing out there except the planet!

"Tulak! What's on the detectors?"

From deep in the ship, a series of musical tones thrummed up and down the scale as Tulak, the giant Trogian robot sang his reply into the com.

"Tulak says—" Lincheni began.

"I heard, I heard! Don't just sit there! Have the computer put the ceepees onto the bastard and burn his ass."

"You mean 'them'. I've got the attackers on visual."

Dal looked at the screen, and felt the sweat running down the crease in his muscular spine. Six, seven, nine—no—twelve ships! The burned smell seemed to grow stronger—or was that his own fear? He slipped his fingers into the giant half-gloves that were the pilot's controls, and began tapping various fingers lightly upon the surfaces. The sensitive plastic felt cold and unyielding, but he knew the ship was responding. He put her into a bone-wrenching turn, and started to stroke the computer in for evasive running—

Then the damned gravity began to fade! Dal could feel himself growing lighter, and he began to float away from the controls. His mouth became very, very dry. Twelve ships! They'd never be able to make it into hyper in time—!

"*Tulak. Do something.*"

Another series of musical notes bleeped over the com. Good! The robot had the gravity working again. Dal could feel himself start to drift back toward the controls. Next time, he'd keep himself strapped in!

"The shit's hit it now, gang!" Dal yelled. "Tulak, what's the best way out of this mess?"

Lincheni's hairy paws were busy running over his own controls, but his Trogian was better than Dal's. "Tulak says there isn't any—!"

"I heard!" Dal looked at the screens again. Twelve fucking ships. Why? This was a neutral world—out of the way—they weren't even *wanted* in this sector!

Lincheni had finally gotten the charged-particle cannons—the ceepees—operating. The computer did the actual aiming and firing, being much faster and more accurate, but it took a formal command to initiate the sequence.

"Lin, how are we doing?"

Lincheni turned for a second to stare at Dal with hooded yellow eyes. "Against *twelve* ships? We've got less chance than a snowball in a supernova!"

"Tulak, you iron birdbrain! Can we outrun—?"

"Deedle dum." Uh uh. No. Negative.

Dal's mind whirled. The sweat had spread from his back to his face and hands. He could not only smell the burned insulation, but the sour perspiration of the demi-whelf sit-

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ting next to him. There were twelve ships latched onto his tail; they couldn't outrun 'em and couldn't outfight 'em. There was only one thing to do.

"Stand by! I'm going to bring her about! We'll head for the planet!"

"You're crazy!" Lincheni rasped.

"You two got any *better* ideas?"

"Uh . . . ." Lincheni began.

"Negative," Tulak intoned.

"Listen! We'll go for an end run, then cut back through the middle of the formation! Tulak, give us all the juice you can—hit the red line if you have to! If we can get into the middle of 'em, they won't be able to shoot without hitting each other!"

Lincheni muttered something about the insanity of terrans, but his six-fingered paws kept flying over his controls.

Deep in the hub of the control center, Tulak the robot said nothing; he merely carried out his functions with mechanical precision, his massive limbs moving impossibly fast for such a large being.

The pit of Dal's stomach seemed to be full of something alive and roiling around, and his sweat covered him like a tepid bath. He was both hot and cold, and there was a bitter, metallic taste on his tongue. As he watched, the dots of the enemy ships on the screen grew larger. He began praying to every god he'd ever heard of in his brief twenty-three years. He alternated between that and cursing, in every language he'd picked up on thirty-five worlds.

The ship shook, with a slapping, gonging noise, as the enemy ships found the *Starbird* with their particle cannons. So far, the shields had held—but Dal didn't know how many more shots they could take. The air was growing warmer, a bad sign, and the smell of death-impending was thick in his nostrils.

He remembered what it had been like during his first battle, during the bloody and terrible war, between the mighty Omicron and Delta Systems. Of course, that had been nearly six years ago, a long time—he'd only been seventeen! But it was all coming back in too-vivid detail, now. He'd only been a gunnery crewman, then, not running his own ship, but the feeling was the same! The trapped feeling of doom. . . .

"Tulak! It's yours! Put us into a hard parabola straight at the center ship in the formation. Lin, put all the ceepees onto that ship. And hang on!"

Dal felt the gravity increase, and the centrifugal force pull his body hard, harder, incredibly harder into the seat as Tulak took control and brought the ship around. His body sagged, his cheeks drooped, his lower teeth seemed to stick out in a grimace, and his arms felt bonded to the couch. It was up to Tulak, now. Only the giant robot had the strength to run the controls—both Dal and Lincheni were too mashed down to move.

Suddenly the center ship flared on the screen in an angry, red-orange flash that sent the vessel bursting in all directions. The *Starbird's* deadly green streams of charged-particles had done it!

"A . . . hit!" Dal moaned

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through his thick tongue and stretched lips!

"Eleven vessels remain," came Tulak's sing-song over the com into Dal's pressure-stretched ears.

"Thanks . . . a . . . lot!" he groaned, jaw sagging with the effort of speech.

"Go . . . for . . . the . . . hole. . . He was on the edge of blacking out.

"Affirmative," Tulak sang.

The ships expanded, to fill the screen, until Dal could see the identification numbers gleaming at him, until nothing else but ships, everywhere ships! were visible—

And they were through!

The pressure began to ease as the curved path straightened somewhat. The acceleration couch hummed and massaged at Dal's aching muscles, and he found he could breathe and even move his bone-weary arms.

"Haha ha! We made it! Figure out an orbit that will slingshot us around the planet, and I'll get us into hyper as soon as we clear!"

Dal glanced up at his comp-screen digital read-out. "Those elbow-suckers will be eating hydrogen exhaust in a few minutes!"

"Maybe." Lincheni said. He nodded toward one of the rear view screens, pointing with his long, black nose.

One of the attacking ships had managed to pull away, somehow, and was pulling a narrow loop around to follow the *Starbird*.

"One lousy ship!" Dal said, sneering. "A Henry-Class cruiser. We can chop that dung-eater up into a million—"

"And give the others time to catch up?"

Dal glared at Lin. "You're a pain sometimes, you know?" He ground his teeth together so hard he could not only feel the pressure, he could hear the permaplastic fillings squeak. And the metallic taste hadn't gone away yet, either. "Crap, crap, crap!"

He tongued the comswitch. "Tulak, can we outrun that bastard?"

"Possibly."

"Possibly? What the hell does that mean?"

"The ship itself is only slightly faster," he sang, "so in theory, we can outrun it."

The air-conditioners seemed to be working again, and Dal felt a breeze begin to chill him where it touched his face and neck. "Go on, what's the rest of it?"

"We will, however, come within range of the pursuing ship's weaponry before we achieve orbit, should he decide to fire upon us."

Should he decide to. . . ? Dal knew damned well he'd decide to fire!

"How can we slow him down?"

"The only practical method for slowing the pursuer would be to seed proximity mines."

"Well, don't just sit there, Lin, you heard Tulak—!"

"Uh, Dal, we . . . uh *used* the last of the mines while running from the cyfy'con ships near Rizonuh last month."

"Damn!" Damn, damn, damn! "Well, I suppose we'll just have to—!"

There was a thundering roar, and the *Starbird* shook, as if swatted by a giant hand. Blue and red sparks jumped from the control panels, and Dal felt an electric shock from the

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glove controls. He jerked his hands away, and the control pit filled suddenly with acrid, blue-gray smoke, swirling up from the ruined controls in a vile-smelling fog. Emergency sirens howled, and automatic fire-fighting units were triggered. The hiss of foam as it squeezed from cracks in the micro-circuit boards joined the other babble of sound.

"Tulak!"

"We've taken a direct hit on the main drive unit," the robot chimed, as if talking of the weather. "The hyper shifters are gone, most of the normal space engines are destroyed, and the ship is now on emergency back-up system Three."

"Three?"

"Three."

Oh shit! Dal's gut wanted to erupt, his heart seemed to be trying to knock a hole in his ribs! Three was the last back up system—it had barely enough power to do anything!

His tongue scrabbled for the comswitch. "Can you get us down—to planet-side?"

There was a pause, only a few seconds, but it seemed forever. "Tulak!"

"I am unable to calculate that with any reasonable degree of—"

"Never mind! *Try*"

"Affirmative."

The ship skewed crazily, and Dal waved his hands uselessly in front of his face, trying to clear the cloak of choking, blinding smoke. Next to him, he could hear Lincheni cursing, mostly in fluent demi-whelf, but throwing in Interspeak and Saxlo occasionally for emphasis.

They began a spiral toward the planet, a lurching, bouncing,

stomach-turning path. There weren't any more explosions, and Dal didn't wonder why—the cruiser expected them to go up like a meteorite when they hit the atmosphere!

The *Starbird* began to pick up the outer edges of the planet's air, and Dal could hear the screams of the heat-shields. The control pit began to get hot, until breathing burned his nostrils, dried his lungs.

The smoke had cleared somewhat, and he could see the forward viewers were still working—something of a minor miracle! Only he didn't like what he saw. The surface of the planet was coming up fast, much too fast! Even if the shields held, they'd probably hit the ground so fast they'd dig a hole a couple of kilometers deep. Or be splattered over ten kilometers in a large number of very small pieces!

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It was up to Tulak! He'd pulled them out of some hairy situations before. . . .

The centrifugal force built up, as somehow, Tulak managed a ragged curve, using the dying engines to their fullest. But the pressure was too much for Dal, and he didn't even have time to tell his friends good-bye before he blacked out. . . .

II

Dal didn't exactly wake up—he sort of *fell* up. The ship was tilted at a crazy angle, and he'd been crammed against a bent bulkhead. He was still belted into the pilot's couch, but the unit had torn loose from the ship and was jammed against several pieces of wreckage. When he tried to move, to relieve the one, big ache he'd become, he shifted the precarious balance, and the couch tipped over and fell—toward the ceiling. That's how he knew the ship was upside-down.

"Lin? Hey, Lin! Where are you? Are you okay—?"

"Piss on everybody!" came a muffled growl.

Dal managed to unbuckle himself and stand on unsteady feet. He looked around for the Demi-Whelf, but couldn't spot him.

A hairy, six-fingered paw burst suddenly from a thick pile of electronic wreckage. It was joined quickly by a second paw, which began throwing junk in all directions. Muffled curses continued to filter up through the pile of smashed circuitry. Dal moved to help his co-pilot.

"Hey, are you—?"

"I'm fine!" He stood, and dusted debris from his thick, brown pelt. He sneezed once, and shook his head. "Bastards!" Then, "Tulak?"

Dal grabbed a com headset, but it was dead. He threw it down. "Come on! We'd better go see if—"

Smash! The wall separating the control pit from the galley burst open, as if it was nothing more than thin paper! The vast, three-meter-high bulk of Tulak suddenly filled one end of the room.

"Are you injured?" he sang.

★

Outside, the three surveyed the ruin of the once-proud *Starbird*. The hull was breached in at least fifty places, the drives smashed, the ship a total loss. It would never fly the heavens again.

"Dammit," Dal hissed softly. "Dammit."

The area around the crash site was apparently some kind of tropical rain forest. There seemed to be a large variety of very tall and very green trees, some reaching heights of fifty meters, and lush vines and lower foliage sprouted all over. A hundred kinds of flowers dotted the area, in shades of red and orange and purple and white. The air was thick with the smell of plants and pollen, and heavy with humidity. Dal felt the heat of the sun burning down upon him.

"Well," he said, "it looks as if we've got a slight problem."

"More than one," Tulak intoned.

Both Dal and Lincheni turned to look at the robot. Tulak was half-again Dal's height, a seamless,

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shining, silver figure, with no breaks in his smooth facade—except for a thin slit across the middle of his otherwise-blank face. Sometimes if he looked carefully, Dal could see a thin, bluish light behind that slit. And the sound with which the Trogian Engineers had programmed Tulak to speak also came from there—just as it had for nearly twelve thousand solar years. Tulak was very old—and he had been around.

The robot continued singing. "The insignia and numbering system on the ships which attacked us have been previously recorded in my memory."

"And. . . ?" Dal and Lin asked together.

"They belong to the ships of Lord Kreeg Hookthorn."

"Damn!"

"But he's dead!" Lin said. "His fleet was wiped out!"

"His body was never found," Tulak continued. "And depending on whose figures were correct, anywhere from five to five thousand ships were unaccounted for after the final battle in the Omicron-Delta war."

"Oh, shit!" Lin said.

Yeah, thought Dal. Hookthorn! Alive! If that was true, they weren't the only ones in trouble! If Hookthorn was somehow alive and holed up on this backwater planet, rebuilding his navy, the galaxy could be in for a big, nasty surprise!

Another thought occured to Dal, but Lin voiced it first. "If it was one of Hookthorn's patrols who blasted us, you can bet your last cred they are looking for us!" The short, squat Demi-Whelf looked up at Dal from his stumpy meter-and-a-half, and scratched at an insect which had landed on his hairy shoulder. "And you can tape what they'll do to us if they find us!"

Yeah. Hookthorn wasn't noted for his loving nature.

"We'd better get out of here." Dal said.

There wasn't a lot to be salvaged from the dead ship. Only two of the skimcycles were still operational—one would barely support Tulak's weight, so Dal and Lin would have to ride double on the other. Most of the food and water had ruptured from its containers, and the smell of it permeated the crushed ship. The whole thing was a mess! Dal gritted his teeth in anger! He'd spent a year working the dangerous firejewel lode on Cyntax to earn enough to buy the *Starbird*. He'd nearly died fifty times! And now, only two years later, she was . . . He shook his head and squared his shoulders.

Somebody was going to pay for this!

But first things first—they had to get away from here.

And, there was yet another problem: just where *was* this? Where could they go—especially if Hookthorn did have control of this world?

As they gathered what supplies they could, Dal asked Tulak what he knew about the planet called Cynthia Dianne.

"Planet number 436-70-5395, named 'Cynthia Dianne' after its discoverer, has been colonized by humans for three hundred solar years. It is the fourth planet in this six-planet system, approximately

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one-hundred-and-forty-million kilometers from its G-type primary star. Gravity is point nine terran standard. Climate ranges from tropical/sub-tropical over most of the equatorial and surrounding zones, to moderate in the northern and southern latitudes. There are two polar ice caps, ranging in size from—''

"Skip all that! What about the people? The government? Native intelligence?''

"Any dangerous animals?'' Lincheni added, looking around at the thick jungle.

"My last input indicates a democratic monarchy as the prevailing form of government. There is one intelligent local life form, the Culebrath, a snake-like being which rates point seven on the terran Raadspin Scale. This creature is responsible for one of the planet's main exports of precious metals—''

"Something's out there.'' Lin hissed, pulling his ceepee from its holster.

Dal jerked his own particle spitter from its black plastic holster. "Tulak?''

The robot turned its face-slit toward the thick stand of brush Lin was pointing toward.

"There is a large quadruped hidden in the vegetation,'' he said. "I am unable to determine if it is carnivorous—''

There was a splintering of breaking branches, a creaking of larger shrubs and trees, and—

Something broke into the clearing. It looked something like a rhino Dal had seen a picture of once, only larger. It was covered with a thick plating, a natural armor, and from the size and shape of its needle-pointed teeth, Dal knew it wasn't a leaf-eater. The wind gusted in their direction, and Lin wrinkled his nose. Dal also caught the fetid smell—rotting meat, probably trapped in the teeth of the moster.

"Uh oh!'' Dal said. The thing looked tough. Maybe the two spitters would stop it, maybe not. Tulak wasn't armed with anything except his own considerable strength—his makers had programmed into him an injunction against the use of any weapons.

The situation didn't look particularly appealing.

"Lin! Can you—?''

The short Demi-Whelf nodded. "I'm trying! It's mind is strange, but dull.''

The huge, purple-green creature padded heavily forward, its stumpy tail twitching, cat-like.

Dal's skin crawled. His finger wanted to start firing the spitter, but he held off. If he didn't hit it right, the wounded beast might kill them.

"Lin!'' The thing was only ten meters away now, and still advancing purposefully.

"I think I've got it!'' Lincheni said. And with that, the little Demi-Whelf began to *change*!

Lin's outlines seemed to blur and dissolve, to grow and expand! Though he'd seen it before, Dal was still fascinated. Lincheni's form shifted, faded, and suddenly—

It became a replica of the creature from the jungle. Only it was larger and fiercer looking than the original!

It was the Demi-Whelf's most potent defense—the gift of mimicry. The Whelves were empathic in

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times of danger, and like ultimate chameleons, they could appear to become like the thing which threatened them. They could take on the size, shape, color—even the smell—because they existed in the mind's eye; they were a splinter of imagination.

Dal didn't know what the creature thought, but he was certain the projection was working—the monster stopped, suddenly puzzled.

Quickly, Dal moved at right angles to the beast; it didn't seem to notice him.

Three meters away, and the rotten smell was almost overpowering. He was almost behind it, and it seemed to be a solid-looking mass of over-lapping plate. Damn! No, wait! There—behind the neck, at the base of the huge oval skull. . . .

A break in the plating!

The beast still seemed to be puzzled, but it was beginning to sway from side-to-side—a sign of attack, maybe. It was now or never!

Dal brought the particle spitter up and held it steady in a two-handed grip. He aimed at the bare spot. Slowly, slowly, don't jerk, dammit—he squeezed the firing stud. . . .

The weapon hummed, the thin green stream of charged-and-deadly particles burst forth and lanced at the creature. The giant roared with a sound which shook the leaves in the trees. It jumped forward, incredibly fast for such a large being.

Tulak spun and pivoted to one side as the monster charged by, and brought one of his alloy fists down onto the thing's massive head with a squishy thump!

Lincheni jumped to the other side, and a stream of ceepee fire flared from the too-real looking replica. Lin's blast struck the armored side of the thing, burned a section of hide, then glanced off, without any real damage!

It didn't matter. The thing lay dead, a large, smoking wound in its neck.

The Demi-Whelf began to shimmer and change, and in a moment, the short, canine-like figure was back to normal. The three of them looked down at the fallen animal. Dal noted a concave section of smashed-and-depressed skull—the spot where Tulak had hit in passing.

"Whew!"

"Yeah," Lin added.

"It would appear my input regarding this world is incomplete. I have no record of any such animal," Tulak sang. "It might be wise to proceed somewhat cautiously in the future."

Dal and Lin looked up at the impassive face of the robot.

"Brother!" Dal said. Tulak was always the master of understatement.

"Let's finish loading the skimcycles and proceed cautiously out of here."

The only problem was, where were they going?

And what were they going to do when they got there?"

III

The skimcycle was crowded, having been designed for only one passenger. With Lin and the extra supplies, it was a wonder it could fly at all. Basically, it was a simple, flat platform with a seat, a

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too-low plastic windshield, and a control panel full of idiot lights. The whole thing sat on a repellor motor which could be inclined to speed up, slow down or stop. It was a short-range vehicle, only good for a couple thousand kilometers on a single charge, and capable of speeds no faster than a hundred kilometers per hour.

Among other things, Dal wished the damned windshield was higher; various insects had been splattering their smelly bodies onto his head and upper body all morning. The bug-spattered plastic only reached halfway up Dal's muscular chest. Every now and then, after a particularly large bug would whap into him, Dal would glare down at Lincheni, who would sit and grin his whelf-grin. Since Lin was shorter, he wasn't getting hit nearly as often.

They were flitting just above the tops of the tallest trees, Tulak's cycle slightly ahead. The small and cheap transceivers on the cycles only had a short range—a few kilometers—but they occasionally picked up some static-ridden signals from some distant transmitter. The signals seemed to be the strongest in the direction of the sunrise, so Dal had decided to head in that direction.

It was a pretty world, lush rainforest, but Dal was having trouble appreciating it. The panorama of jungle, the ice-blue sky, the distant boom of a far-off thunderstorm were all distractions he didn't want. His ship was dead, and somebody on this stinking planet had killed her!

He planned to look up whoever was responsible. . . !

Suddenly, Tulak's musical tones sang out over the transceiver.

"Observe to our right."

Dal and Lin looked.

The jungle had given way to . . . something strange. Where there was green, thick foliage and flowers before, suddenly there was a large area of gray-black that looked like, of all things, a—wheatfield! Even stranger, the hot wind which stirred the trees below didn't seem to be affecting the strange area! Odd. Very odd.

"Veer over that way," Dal called to Tulak. "Let's see what that is."

The two skimcycles made the turn gradually, and began to drop lower.

"Looks like some kind of . . . grass," Lin said.

"Yeah, if grass came made in long, skinny, gray-iron rods!"

"There's a clearing, there, near the edge," Lin said.

"Good, We need a rest stop anyway," Dal said, wiping a greasy bug carcass from his neck.

"The area seems to be several kilometers in area," Tulak sang out.

"Um."

The stuff was taller than it appeared from the air. Dal guessed its height at five meters. It didn't seem to thin out at the edge of the clearing. One spot, there was nothing; then, zap, the stuff, in a nice, even line.

They dismounted from the cycles and looked carefully around. After the episode with the rhino-monster, Dal was planning on being very cautious. Both he and Lin drew

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their spitters. Tulak stood impassively by the cycles, turning his head slowly to scan the terrain.

Dal still wondered sometimes why Tulak had joined his crew. The big robot had been programmed by a race which had left the galaxy thousands of years ago, and nobody was quite sure what his motivations were.

There had been nearly a thousand of the blank-faced robots discovered at one time or another by several of the intelligent races. They seemed helpful; they *were* useful, and they signed on with whom they chose. Tulak had walked up to Dal one day and offered his services. Dal had quickly accepted. Aside from the fact they were known to be good crew, they also had another big advantage: they worked for free.

Lin had moved closer to the funny-looking stalks, and Dal pulled his mind back to the present and followed him.

Up close, it looked like a section of extruded steel rod, diamond-shaped, with each piece as big around as Dal's little finger. The base of each rod was about eight or ten centimeters from the next. He was reaching out to touch one when Lincheni screamed!

"Mother of Thity! Spawn of a Greff!"

Dal spun toward Lin, his spitter extended and seeking a target. There was nothing there, except Lin. Slowly he raised from his defensive crouch: Lin was hopping around, slinging one of his paws up and down rapidly.

"What—?"

"I cut one of my pulating fingers on the goddammed rods!"

Dal inspected the injured digit. There was a little of the whelf's purple blood, but not much damage. He laughed. "Didn't your mother ever tell you not to touch strange—?"

"Laugh! It'd be different if it was *your* finger!"

Suddenly, there was a metallic ringing, a clanging, as if someone—or something—was banging into the rods.

The sound was coming from *inside* the field! Dal looked at Lin. Whatever the rods were, plant or mineral, they *were* hard and sharp, sharp enough to cut flesh at a touch! If something was in there, moving around without being cut to tatters . . .

"Suddenly this stuff doesn't seem all that interesting," Dal said quickly.

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"I agree!"

In twenty seconds, the three were airborne again, heading away from the strange rods.

★

They had been in transit for nearly eight hours. Tulak had informed them that the planet had a twenty-one hour cycle, so there was only a little daylight remaining.

They had begun looking for a clearing for camp when Tulak spotted the structure.

"There is a small building about a kilometer to our left," he said, in his off-hand sing-song. "It appears to be of humanoid construction."

They put the cycles into a tight turn, and dropped lower to utilize the cover of the trees. It might not be civilization, but it was a sign they were getting there. So far, Dal hadn't worried about what to do when they reached it, but he supposed it was time to start thinking about it.

The sun was mostly gone, but the heat and dampness lingered, and he felt clammy. The smell of smashed insects reminded him of rotten fruit.

Dal wished he was in space, in his ship, in the clean vacuum he loved. True, he'd been something of a disreputable citizen; a privateer, a gun-runner, a charter-for-pay, no-questions-asked captain of a ship which sometimes barely kept going. But it was his choice of life—and far better than being a ground-pounder.

Like he was now. In this god-forsaken hole at the end of the Galaxy!

Well. They were going to leave this world. If there were ships which could shoot him down, there were ships to be had. One way or another! They owed him one, and by all the gods and stars, he was going to get one!

They put the cycles down half a klick from the building and its small clearing. They started toward it, weapons at the ready.

The "building" was little more than a crude hut. It was made from rough wood, lashed together with some kind of vine; the roof was thatched with a type of broad, blue-green leaf. Except for some crude, wooden furniture and a mouldy animal skin rug, the hut seemed empty. There were no signs of life around it.

"What now?" Lin whispered.

"See if you can find somebody," Dal said. "Don't let them see you."

They turned to look at Tulak. Even in the gathering dusk, he was highly visible. "Tulak, maybe you ought to stay back in the trees!"

They split up, and Dal started to work his way around the edge of the clearing. The insects which had been splattering him all day seemed to abound here—the air seemed alive with the damned things, buzzing everywhere. The heavy air brought smells of jungle; rotting plants mixed with the odor of pollen. When he was nearly halfway round the clearing, he passed a large tree, and there was the old man.

It was hard to determine the man's age or race. He was human, but could have been seventy or a hundred. His skin was leathery brown, but that could have been

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from the sun. He was bald, his head was thrown back, and he was staring into the sky. He sat in a knotted cross-legged fashion, his arms folded across his chest, and his thin, muscular body was naked, except for a pendant on a leather thong around his neck.

Nothing very unusual—except the old man was sitting *ten centimeters off the ground!*

Dal looked for devices—motors, wires, this was absurd!—but couldn't see anything! The man was—was—*floating!* In the damp air, without support! That was impossible!

As he watched, the old man brought his head down, until he was looking straight ahead. Dal slipped back behind the tree, so that only his face was uncovered. In the shadows, he'd be hidden—

The bald man turned his eyes, then his head, to look directly toward Dal. He knew he couldn't be seen, still—

"Greetings," the man said, in a strong voice. "Welcome to my home." Perfect Interspeak too!

Dal's mind stalled. He'd seen a lot of strange sights on a lot of different worlds—this had to be a trick!

"You can come out," the old man continued. "Call your friends, too. I won't hurt you."

Well, shit! Dal moved from behind the tree, his already clammy skin gone suddenly wetter with nervous sweat. The spitter's plastic handle felt slippery in his hand, despite the sharp checkering on the grips. He pointed the weapon at the old man, still hovering in the air.

"Don't make any sudden moves!" he said. Oh, boy, was that a stupid thing to say! There was a dry-bitter taste in his mouth.

"Why not?" The old man seemed amused.

Dal waved the spitter. "Because I've got this!".

"Oh, that? You can't hurt anything with that—it doesn't work."

Involuntarily, Dal glanced down at the weapon. "Oh? We'll see how it works!" He pointed the ceepee pistol at a tree branch on the ground near—no, *under*—the old man, and pulled the firing stud. A little heat would show the old bastard—

Nothing happened! Dal's stomach flip-flopped, and the dry-bitter taste in his mouth turned into pure dust and quinidex! He tried again. Nothing!

"Lin!" As he yelled, Dal saw the old man begin to settle slowly to the ground. By the time Lincheni arrived at a dead-run, the naked figure was seated on the earth, smiling broadly.

"Lin, shoot that tree." He pointed with his own useless pistol.

The Demi-Whelf never hesitated. He fired, and a runny, burned-black spot appeared on the trunk. There was the smell of cooked wood and boiled sap.

Dal stared at his own spitter. He jerked it up and pointed it at the same tree. Another burned spot erupted sap! The smell grew stronger.

"How—?—Lin, this old man, he—"

"What old man? What are you talking about?"

Dal spun. The old man was gone! But—

"There was an old man, there!

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You ran right past him. I saw him floating in the air—" he stopped. Lin was looking at him funny. "Hey, look, I swear—! Come on, he was *there*! Let's get back to that hut."

At the hut, they found Tulak regarding the door. Dal glanced at Lin, then said, "Tulak, did you see an old man—?"

"Inside," Tulak sang.

Thank the gods I'm not crazy! Dal thought. Aloud, he said, "Come on!" He and Lin started to move for the door. Suddenly, one of Tulak's massive arms came up to stop them.

"Tulak—what—?"

"Wait."

"Wait? Tulak, *move*!

"Wait."

What the hell was going on here? Tulak was blocking the door. But nobody could control the big robot. Just what—?

Suddenly the door opened. A faint smell of some fragrant smoke wafted out, and the old man appeared in the doorway.

He was dressed now, in snug leather breeches and a pull-over silk shirt. He wore high-topped boots, and had a large, wicked-looking knife in a clear plastic sheath strapped to the front of his right thigh. His bald head gleamed dully in the dimming light.

"Thank you, Tulak," he sang, in the tongue-twisting Trogian song-language.

"You—you speak Trogian? But how—?" Dal was at a loss, confused. Understanding the language was hard. For a human to speak it was almost unheard of.

"I haven't always lived on this planet," the old man said. "But if you will come inside, I will be happy to answer your questions.

Dal looked at Lin and Tulak. Numbly, he nodded.

IV

Inside the rude hut, Dal got another shock.

Under the crudely tanned skin rug on the rough floor, there was a massive wooden trap-door. Under that, a set of descending stairs. They followed the stairs down, through a damp smelling stone corridor which twisted several times, and finally—

Gods! There was a huge room, at least thirty meters on a side. And it was filled with furniture, books, holo equipment, machines. . . .

Just what the *hell* was going on?

"I expected you sooner," the old man said. "I didn't think you'd stop at the weed patch."

Lin and Dal glanced at each other, then at Tulak. Whoever this person was, he was damned well informed. Too well informed.

"Have a seat," the old man said. "I'll get some refreshments." He whistled, and a short and stubby servobot appeared, carrying a tray of plastic juicebulbs.

Dal looked down at his weapon, still clutched tightly in his hand. Silently, he holstered the spitter. This whole thing was crazy, but the old man didn't seem dangerous. Besides, he had already shown he could make the ceepee pistol malfunction. Dal sat on a nearby form-chair. Lincheni did the same, although his eyes kept darting around the perimeter of their furry

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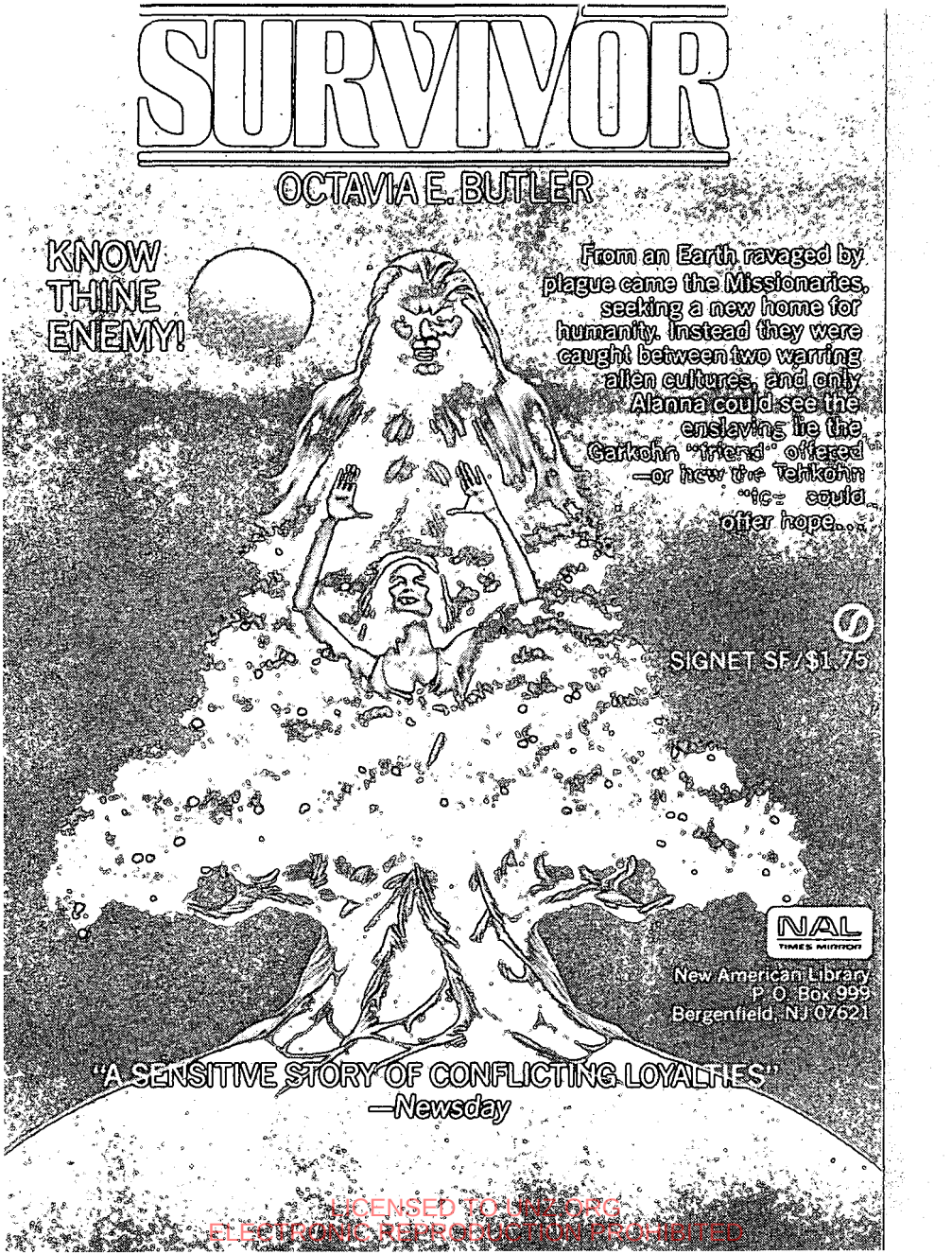
SURVIVOR

OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

KNOW THINE ENEMY!



From an Earth ravaged by plague came the Missionaries, seeking a new home for humanity. Instead they were caught between two warring alien cultures, and only Alanna could see the enslaving lie the Gatekohn "friend" offered —or know the Tehkohn "ig-" could offer hope...

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sockets, watching for anything unusual.

Hell, it was *all* unusual!

"I neglected to introduce myself. I am Lao Emba, student of Ch'an, and owner of this place. May I ask your names?"

Reluctantly, Dal told him. "I'm Dal Harusun, captain—uh, *former* captain of the ship *Starbird*. This is Lincheni, my first, and Tulak—whom it seems you've already met."

Emba grinned, showing even and white teeth. "Ah, Tulak. How long has it been? Twenty years?"

"Twenty-two terran standards," Tulak sang.

Dal did a double-take. So they *had* met before!

The servobot passed, and without thinking, Dal took a container of juice. It had a pleasant, musky taste.

"How did you do that—float in the air like that?" Dal asked.

"A simple re-routing of gravitational attraction—not unlike the repellor motors on your own cycles."

"But *how*? I couldn't see any machines."

"Oh, there weren't any. It's a mental device, one of the Ch'an exercises—a toy, really. A simple application of attaching one's Flow to the Universal Flow."

Uh. Yeah, sure, whatever that meant. "You say you and Tulak know each other?"

"We did once. A long time ago in a place far away."

Dal couldn't believe this. Here he was, in some underground palace on a strange planet, talking to a man who could float in the air! And a man who knew his robot!

"This . . . Ch'an you speak of, it's some kind of religious belief?"

"In a way."

Dal looked dubious, and Emba laughed.

"Did you think religious men wore old robes and long beards and lived in huts like that one above here?"

Dal shrugged uncomfortably. "Something like that."

Emba laughed again. "Don't believe everything you hear, boy. There are anti-esthetics like that—but it's not necessary to go that far. Those who want to suffer for their beliefs don't play with full decks. True," he waved his hand, "all this isn't needed or required. But as long as it's available, why shouldn't I enjoy it?"

Dal found an interesting spot on his boot and studied it.

"How did you know we were coming?" Lincheni demanded suddenly.

"I tracked your ship down on radar after Hookthorn's boys blasted you."

Dal jerked his head up. "You know Hookthorn?"

"Not personally. I know he brought four thousand ships here a year ago and took over the planetary government."

"Son-of-a-bitch! Then he *is* building a new navy!"

"Seems that way."

"What's the local populace doing about it?"

"Nothing. Hookthorn wiped out the local token armed forces when he came in. These people are peaceful—farmers and miners, mostly. There's about fifty million of them here. They're tough indi-

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viduals, but not soldiers. They don't know how to fight."

"Yeah, well, we can—at least well enough to get the ship they owe us!"

"I have no doubt of that." He sighed. "Do you know what will happen if Hookthorn can assemble any kind of fighting force before the Confederation finds him? He'll jump some world and start another galaxy-wide war!"

"Yeah, probably."

"And once they discover that this is his home base, the idiots that run the Confederation will no doubt try to blast it out of the sky! All these innocent people will die!"

Dal studied his boot again. "Too bad."

"And most likely they'll ruin my home, as well! Even if they don't, who wants to live on a burned out cinder?"

Dal looked up. Here was a twist!

"I can't let that happen."

"Oh?" Dal looked at Lin, who seemed to shrink into the massaging form-chair. "Just what do you plan to do about it?"

"We'll have to stop him."

"*We?*"

"Yes. The four of us."

Dal jumped to his feet. "You're crazy! You expect *four* of us to go against Hookthorn? If he's got four thousand ships, that means he's got probably fifty thousand troops!"

"More or less," Emba said, the grin on his face never wavering.

"Sorry, old man, you can count us out. We'll just rip off a ship and be gone. Maybe we'll drop the Confeds a note telling them where Hookthorn is stashed; other than that, sorry. We have places to go. I'm afraid we can't help you."

Emba didn't move. "Oh, but you will!"

Dal suddenly felt himself grow sleepy. His vision swam and blurred. He looked at the juice container, then up at Emba's face.

"Drugs! You drugged us!"

"Don't be ridiculous," Emba said. "Why would I go to all that trouble? It's just a touch of the Flow to your sleep center. While you're resting, Tulak and I will catch up on old times."

Dal reached for his spitter, but he knew he'd never make it in time.

He didn't.

V

He was in some rickety kind of aircraft, flying over a slaughtered, desolate world! Beneath him lay the ruins of a civilization—burned out, blasted, destroyed—and still smoking. He was close enough to see the bodies of people—gods, thousands upon thousands of them! They were twisted into horrible shapes, some frozen in flight, some burned into crisp statues by the effects of terrible radiation—

The aircraft turned, a right-angle, dizzying turn, and another, vaster killed area swam into view. The walls around him seemed to dissolve, vanish; and now he could not only see the dead, he could smell them, could smell the cooked flesh! He wanted to vomit, and the sour, reflux taste filled his throat, but could not seem to come up—

He could hear them! Somehow, some of the poor bastards had lived through the destruction! They were calling, crying out for hel—

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He wasn't in the ship anymore! He was on the ground, walking through the victims! He could feel them brush against his legs as he walked. Clutching, bony hands touched his feet! Horrible things crackled under his boots, things which had once been human—

★

His eyes popped open, and Dal was suddenly awake. Sweat rolled from him, despite the coolness of the room's air conditioners, and he found his fists were so tightly clenched the nails had cut into his palms. He glanced at his chrono. It was morning.

Across from him, Lao Emba sat, staring over the tops of his tented fingers.

"I trust you had pleasant dreams?"

"It was . . ." Dal shook his head. "It—I—wait! It *was* only a dream, wasn't it?"

"Yes. But one which could come true."

Lin began stirring in his chair. As Dal watched, the Demi-Whelf blurred around the edges, as he did when he changed during periods of danger. Dal looked back at Emba. "All those dead people. . . ."

"You could help stop it," the old man said.

"How? What could four of us do against Hookthorn's army?

"There are ways."

Lin seemed to be waking up, and he looked as bad as Dal felt. "You okay?"

The Demi-Whelf nodded, but he was shaky.

Dal sighed, and looked at Emba. The images of the dead and dying floated in his mind. The smell, the sound, they'd been so *real!* "All right. I'll do what you want."

"And I," Lin added.

"Lin, you don't have to!" Dal knew Lincheni had only signed on originally for the chance at big money. It took a lot of creds to buy breeding rights on his world—there weren't enough female whelves. He couldn't ask Lin to join this—this suicide plan!

"I saw those people," Lin said. "My people. I will do what I can!"

Dal nodded. "You seem to know Tulak better than we do, so it looks like you've got yourself a crew."

"Good! I knew you were reasonable! I'm glad I didn't have to do anything drastic to get your attention!"

"Drastic?" Crap! What could be more drastic?

"The dream you had—it could have been made permanent."

Dal shuddered, and Lin swore softly under his breath.

"So what now?" Dal asked.

"We'll have to go to Ste'nel, this world's largest city. There are people there who will be ready to help. I have an old friend who is a senator—he'll know who can be trusted."

"And then?"

"One step at a time, boy, one step at a time."

★

Incredibly, there were other rooms hidden under the ground, some larger than the first one they'd seen! In one of these, a vast cave hollowed from damp, gray rock,

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was a ten-passenger flitter, fully-rigged for atmosphere running!

"It seems our hermit friend is a man of means," Lin said. His voice echoed in the huge chamber.

"Yeah. It seems." So far, everything about this Emba was impressive. Dal was interested in finding out more about this mysterious Ch'an—he had the idea that floating in the air and bad dreams were only the tip of the iceberg.

"They will have found your ship by now, and noted the lack of bodies," Emba said. "We'll have to be careful. Hookthorn will have tightened security."

"Maybe not. There were . . . things in the jungle which could have easily disposed of our corpses."

"And eaten two skimcycles, as well?"

Dal shrugged. No, Hookthorn's trackers wouldn't be careless. When he'd been a gunner on the *Go Placid* during the war, he'd seen just how careful the enemy was. After their ship had been hit and disabled, a number of the men had abandoned her, in lifecraft or deep-suits. Hookthorn's men had tracked each one down and blasted them! No prisoners! The only reason he and a few others had survived was because a big section of the Confederation's fleet had arrived before the crippled ship could be totally destroyed.

No, Hookthorn's men wouldn't be careless—or merciful.

Lord Kreeg Hookthorn. And his wife, the Lady Ursula—the Lady with Smoke Eyes—he had reason to hate them! They'd cost him friends and relatives! But that had been the

war, and it was always impersonal—he'd never seen Hookthorn, only his ships. When the war was over—everybody thought Hookthorn was dead—Dal had buried his memories, and gone to work to get his own ship.

Only now, it was much more personal! They'd killed the *Starbird*! When he'd been seventeen, it had all been a big game, not real. Now, he was nearly twenty-three, and he knew more about life. The bastards had cut him off from space with no more thought than squashing a bug. Ah, to be left alone with the man responsible for just two minutes.

Emba cut into his thoughts. "We're three hundred kilometers from the city. It will take half an hour to get there and I want to get moving. Load up."

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Once aloft, Dal asked Emba a question. "Something's been bothering me. Granted, you could track our ship down on radar—how did you know about our stop at the patch of gray-rods? Your radar couldn't have followed us at tree-top level—not that far away."

Emba set the autopilot and turned to face Dal. "I could say it was because the weed was in your path—that I figured you'd head for the strongest radio transmissions, that you'd be curious and stop."

"You could. But you knew! It wasn't a guess!"

"True," he said, with a chuckle. "Actually, Snegala told me."

Snegala? Dal glanced at Lin. Had they been watched?

"He's one of the Culebrath. That was his patch you stopped at."

Culebrath. Where had he heard that—? Oh. Tulak had mentioned something about a local intelligent life-form.

"The 'rods' you saw are actually a sort of crystal-plant. Biologically speaking, they are quite unique—a variant form of fungus. The rods are all part of a common mycelium—all part of one plant—in that patch, at least. The stalks are composed primarily of iron, with smaller amounts of copper, lead and gold. Don't ask me how it can exist—it simply does."

He paused a few seconds, then added, "The Culebrath eat it."

"Eat it? Those sticks are as sharp as vibro—."

"The Culebrath are very tough. They crawl around through the stalks—they look something like snakes, with fins—and snip the stems at the base. Then they swallow the cut pieces along the length."

"Pourn's balls!" Lin said.

Emba continued. "They utilize most of the mineral and fiber, and excrete the rest—precious metals mostly."

Dal started to speak, but Lin beat him to it. "They shit *gold*?"

Emba laughed. "Yes, if you want to put it that way."

Wait. Dal remembered something else Tulak had said earlier. Something about the export of precious metals . . . Hmm. Put that together with Emba's comment about most of the people on this planet being farmers or miners. . . .

Aloud, Dal said, "You mean the people here make a living collecting snake turds? Gold snake turds?"

Emba laughed louder. "It's a fairly big part of the industry here."

"Well I'll be damned!"

"As will I!" Lin added.

"You'll get a chance to meet some of the Culebrath," Emba said. "We'll need their help against Hookthorn."

Oh, yeah. That. For a moment, Dal had forgotten their suicide mission. Gods, if the folks on Nivenraad could see him now. Going to fight fifty thousand troops, with a crazy old man, a whelf, a giant robot, and some gold-crapping snakes! Nobody would believe it.

Dal didn't believe it!

VI

From the outskirts, Ste'nel looked just like any other fairly large frontier town. The jungle had been cleared away and kept down, and the bulk of the town squatted in the

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center of the cleared space. The streets were laid out in long, straight rows. It was hard to see much in the just-breaking dawn, but in the distance, there was what looked like a military base.

There didn't seem to be much traffic in the streets or the air, and Dal said as much.

"Hookthorn has the entire planet under martial law. You need a good reason to be out."

"Oh? And what's our reason?" Dal glanced back at Tulak and Lin. "How do you explain *us* if we're stopped?"

"We won't be stopped."

"You seem awfully sure!"

"I understand the whelves have a trick, whereby they can appear to be something other than what they are."

Dal nodded.

"To any who view us closely, we appear to be a command flitter, bearing the insignia of an Under-General. We won't be stopped."

"Yeah, well that's fine for line of sight. What about the local air traffic controller? Do we *sound* like an Under-General to the ATC, too?"

Emba regarded him as one might a child asking a naive question. "Of course."

Dal looked at Lin. The Demi-Whelf shrugged. "Of course. You heard the man!"

There was a sudden lurch, and Dal's seat-harness cut into his muscles! The ship seemed to bounce crookedly through the air!

"What—?"

Emba's hands were busy at the controls, putting the flitter into a power dive. "It's one of the damned clone-drones! I didn't figure on them being out."

Dal jerked his head around toward Tulak. "What's a clone-drone?"

"A drone-fighter, run by the extracted brain of an intelligent being's clone."

"Why didn't your voodoo trick fool him, Emba?"

The ship bucked, and dropped with a stomach-twisting free-fall.

"Because the damned clone brain doesn't see with eyes. It uses electronic cameras and sensors, then checks them."

Ah! So this magical Ch'an did have limits! Dal was almost glad—until he realized those limits might get them all killed!

"I'll get the weapons system going." he yelled.

"I doubt it," Lin said. "There doesn't seem to be one."

"What? Emba—?"

"He's right. "I've never needed one. The Ch'an—"

"Is going to get us blown out of the sky!"

"We'll have to land," Emba said. "The clone ship will have called for manned back-up. I think I can handle them on the ground, but it'll be tricky!"

The ship jumped sideways, as if struck by a pounding wave.

"Tulak can stay with me, but I don't want to try too much. Dal, you and Lin will have to get to Senator Hanshi's—I'll meet you there!"

"How? I don't know where it is—"

"Be still!"

With that, Dal suddenly had an image of the senator's house, the

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streets around it, and even what the senator looked like!

"How did—?"

"A memory impress. It's been five years since I've been there, but things won't have changed that much. You'll have to make do. I'm going to be busy trying to convince a squad of troops that what they are seeing is more accurate than the tape on a drone's memory!"

The flitter slewed into a ragged landing on a cleared field. Dal's head thunked against the inner hull.

"Go! Get out of here before the soldiers arrive!"

Dal and Lin scrambled from the flitter and ran quickly away. If anything, the city was hotter than the jungle. Probably due to the output of air conditioners and all the heat retaining stone and plastcrete.

They made it to the shadow of a big storage house, and rested briefly next to the pre-cast green plastic wall. There was an oily smell in the air, and the distant hum of machinery. Ground-bound civilization. Bah!

"Let's get moving," Dal said. "When people start waking up, we don't want to be wandering around."

★

Senator Hanshi's house appeared quiet. It was a large wooden structure, a split-level, dorsi-style unit, set back into a group of cloaking trees and bushes. The foliage was thicker than Dal "remembered". Although it was still early morning, the nearest residence was close enough to see anyone entering or leaving by the front portal.

"We'd better go around back," Dal said. "I'm not sure the senator would want his neighbors to know we've come to call."

They made their way through the brush to the rear of the house. There was a tall, wooden fence around the back, with a single gate at one end. It was, naturally, locked.

"Over the top." Dal hissed. He boosted Lincheni up, then caught the edge of the two-and-a-half meter high fence himself. The wood had a pleasant, evergreen smell, but the top was rough, and he felt the jab of several splinters as they dug into his palms. He pulled himself up and over—it wasn't too bad—and fell—and landed square on top of a prickly bush!

"Ouch! Mother—!"

"Shhh!" Lin hissed. "Somebody might get the wrong idea."

The back portal was a single, thick sheet of plastiglass. It was locked.

Dal knocked. No answer. He tried again. Still nothing.

"Now what?" Lin said, looking around nervously. "Nobody's home."

"Let's try a window."

But all the windows on ground level were opaque-polarized and locked.

They moved back to the door, and Dal drew his spitter.

"Hey, you gonna burn the door? I don't know—"

"I'll buy him a new one. If one of those clone-drones just happens to flit by and see us . . ."

"Yeah, okay, I get your point."

Dal directed a short burst of ceepee at the lock. The green blow

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of the charged particles was soon joined by the white-hot gleam of the lock melting. The plastic vaporized with a smell like burned boot-sole.

They slid the door open, and found themselves in a kitchen. Dal kept the spitter out, and they moved down a short hallway into a large room.

"The senator has nice taste," Lin said, picking up a small, metal sculpture of a nude woman.

Dal grinned. "How would you know? Your women all look like dogs to me—"

"Shhh! I heard something!"

"What? I don't—"

"Make one move and you'll both be dead!" said a woman's voice from behind them.

Dal froze.

"Drop your weapons—very carefully—and turn around."

The two spitters fell lightly to the thick rug, and Dal and Lin turned slowly.

"Oh, wow!" Dal said. The woman standing on the stairs looked to be about nineteen. She was tall and slender, and absolutely beautiful! Her short, dark hair covered her head like a loose cap, and the thin fabric of her sleeping gown failed to hide the heavy curve of high breasts and the slender, perfectly shaped legs, and—the poisoned dartslinger pointed rock-steady at his stomach!

The girl moved down the stairs until she was two meters away from them.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

It was then Dal knew he'd been in space too long. Here was one of the most gorgeous women he'd ever seen, and all he could say was, "Uh, we—uh, that is—well, we—uh. . . ."

"Very bright. Come on! Who are—?"

And Lincheni began to change.

The girl swung the dartslinger toward him. "What are you—?"

And then there were two women, both identical to Dal's eyes!

The real girl seemed startled for a second, and Dal sprang at her, arms outstretched. He caught her shoulders, and for a second, he had time to feel the imprint of her breasts on his chest, time to smell her exotic perfume, time to feel the firm, slim muscles of her body against him.

Then, abruptly, he was sailing through the air, twisting, awkwardly off-balance. He slammed into a wall. The wind was knocked from his lungs. He slid to the carpet, stunned, and—the girl had them covered again!

"I don't know how you did that, fur-face, but it won't work!"

Lin shimmered, and changed back to his normal form. Dal grinned stupidly from the floor, still remembering the feel of her body. Then he felt the ache in his shoulder where he'd hit. Slowly, he got to his feet. This lady knew something about how to protect herself.

"Hey, look, we're trying to find Senator Hanshi," he finally managed.

"Is that the way you normally look for someone? Break into his house and attack his daughter?"

"It's a long story," Dal said, feeling sheepish.

"Fine," she said, gesturing toward a couch with the slinger. "Why don't you tell me all about it."

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★

"That's incredible," she said, still pointing the slinger at them.

"But true," Lin added.

"How do I know Lao really sent you?"

"Like I said, he is supposed to meet us here." Dal was feeling a little more comfortable. At least she hadn't started shooting yet. "And where is the Senator, anyway?"

The girl's expression masked; her eyes flicked down, then quickly back up. "He's . . . dead. Hookthorn had him killed for resisting the take-over. The government's been disbanded."

"I'm sorry."

"We're going to wait and see if Lao Emba comes here, as you said."

"And if he doesn't. . . ?"

"Then you're either criminals or Hookthorn's men—which is the same thing, as far as I'm concerned. Either way. . . ." she trailed off.

Dal glanced at Lin, then back at the girl.

Somehow, that didn't sound at all good.

VII

"Tanya!" Emba came in, followed by Tulak.

"Uncle Lao!"

Uncle Lao? How could anybody call him 'uncle'?

Emba looked at Dal and Lin, and at the dartspitter. "Well, Tanya, I see you've already met two of the leaders of our future liberation army."

"Them?"

"Them. They . . . uh, volunteered, after their ship was blasted."

The girl dropped her gun into the chair carelessly. "If these are leaders, we're in trouble!"

Emba sighed. "It's been a long year, but they'll do. Where's your father?"

She told him, and the old man seemed to age further and collapse. He dropped heavily into a chair, sudden exhaustion drawing lines on his face. "Forgive me—I—the strain of keeping up the facade for the robot and myself was great. And now—your father. . . ."

She touched his gnarled hands with her own smooth fingers.

Dal stood up. "Lin and I need some water. We'll . . . uh, be in the kitchen. Anything we can get you?"

Emba shook his head.

"Uncle Lao, there's so much to tell you. So much has happened in the last six months!"

Lin followed Dal to the kitchen. "What's this about? You know I don't drink plain water."

"I'll tell you what—I'm tired of being somebody's puppet." Since we broke hyperspace, we've been running around like smerps with our heads amputated!"

"So? What options—?"

"I'm going to make some options. The old man painted us a dreary picture of bodies littering the landscape—but I'm kind of fond of my own body."

"I don't—"

"Okay, look, we committed ourselves to help—but I'm no martyr! After we met Emba, I started thinking about our chances of stealing a

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ship and sneaking off-planet. You saw what twelve ships did to us—imagine what four thousand could do—if there really are four thousand."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, how do we know just what the hell is going on? So far, I've been willing to stick with the old man, but I don't trust anybody where my ass is on the line. There are things he isn't telling us!"

"Such as?"

"Such as that comment about it being a 'long year'! Such as that remark the girl made about so much going on in the last six months. He says he hasn't been here in five years—but it sounds like the girl saw him more recently than that. I think he's had something cooking for some time, and I don't know where we fit into it all."

"So what are you going to do?"

"A little exploring."

Dal slipped the empty holster from his belt and pulled his tunic out to cover his waist. "See if you can slip back while they're busy talking and get my spitter."

When Lin returned with the weapon, Dal tucked it inside his pants and covered it with the loose tunic.

"What'll I tell the old man?"

"Tell him I went for a walk. I'll be back by dark."

"Take it easy, huh?"

Dal grinned. "You kidding? Don't worry."

★

The perimeter fence around the camp didn't seem to be guarded. Then Dal saw the automatic laser generators squatting on the bare ground, and the electronic spy-eyes which triggered them sunk into the shiny-steel fence posts.

Anybody who tried to climb that fence would become just that—a body—and probably well-done, at that! He'd have to get in at one of the gates.

Another problem. There were guards at the gates. He couldn't just walk in—that would likely get him as dead as trying to climb the fence.

Obviously, the only way into the base would be in a vehicle the guards wouldn't stop. It wasn't likely a general would stop for hitchhikers, either.

An old memory glimmered in the back of his mind. When he'd been a kid, he'd joined a club which had required its members to sneak into a

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guarded spaceport.

He grinned as he remembered the details of that escapade when he was twelve. Sure! That kind of transport would come and go freely, even on a military base. There was a wooded area back on the road. A fair-sized tree branch on the plastcrete would slow his ride down enough.

★

It was a lot worse than he'd remembered. Even though the truck was only lightly loaded going in, it still wasn't any fun being buried under a layer of garbage. The feel of it was both gritty and slimy, and the smell of it in the hot tropical morning sun was enough to make him wish he didn't have to breathe. He wondered how he could have forgotten the odor of rotten vegetables and rancid meat scraps.

He jumped from the truck at the first stop, and quickly hid between two of the dozens of plastic porta-dump bins.

Well, genius, you're inside the base. Now what? Planning ahead had never been one of his strong points. It was one of the reasons he was such a lousy chess player. He preferred to play things by feel, and improvise as needed. Sometimes it worked. Other times. . . .

Okay, okay. You obviously can't walk around like this. Aside from the fact you stink, your clothes are wrong. Hmmm.

He let four men dump plastic bags into the porta-dumps because they were too big or too small. The fifth man looked just about right.

He stood up. "Excuse me, can you tell me the way to the latrine?"

"Huh?" Clonk!

He used smelly strips from his clothes to bind and gag the unconscious soldier and tossed him into the nearest bin. He carefully covered the man with enough trash so he couldn't be seen. Dal didn't know how long the trooper would be out, but he wasn't going to do much moving when he did wake up.

So far, so good! He'd gotten into the camp, obtained a uniform, and was now anonymous.

Time to start looking around.

★

Three hours later, Dal was convinced Emba hadn't been lying. Even if this was the only base Hookthorn had—and he doubted that—there were at least two thousand ships, along with all the support equipment and personnel needed to keep the small navy operational. He'd only had one close call—when an officer stopped him and told him to get a bath—apparently some of the garbage's odor had remained with him.

He worked his way toward the center of the complex. Everything had the look of newness and military drab about it. The pre-fab plastic buildings glinted dully in the harsh sunlight. Another few minutes, and he'd have the place pretty well scoped out. He planned to swipe something movable then and hop the fence—that was much more appealing than burrowing into the gunk again and waiting for the trash carrier.

He walked nonchalantly through

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the area, between the neutral gray walls. There weren't any trees or bushes or color to break the bare ground. The hot walls gave off a waxy smell, and the traces of garbage he'd missed in changing clothes grew ranker in the afternoon sun.

This was almost boring. He rounded a sharp corner, and—would you look at that! In the middle of all that military starkness, there was a—house! And not just a house, but a deep-red stained house. It had a high, peaked roof, with massive beams edging it, with what appeared to be split wooden shakes for shingles. There were several thin windows of heavy plastiglass running from the ground nearly to the roof, and a heavy, close-grained hardwood door near one end of the structure. There were bushes around the house, and even a ten-meter tall tree nearby.

Well, well. I wonder who lives there?

Slowly, Dal edged closer to the house. It had to be Hookthorn's. If he could just get a good look. . . .

An alarm horn blared so loudly it sent him jumping half a meter into the air. He twisted his head sideways, and saw the round tube of a spy-eye—protruding from the bole of the fern-like tree.

Damn!

He turned and began to run. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of that heavy door opening. He kept moving, but looked back.

His kidneys and bowels screamed at his brain, and he expected to see an armed trooper start blasting—.

What he saw was a very tall woman framed in the doorway—and gods, what a woman! She had long, red hair, and was draped in a flowing, see-through robe of emerald green. As if in slow-motion, Dal saw the middle of the gauzy material part, blown by some stray, hot breeze, to reveal the slim belly and legs of the woman—totally nude underneath! In that suddenly long second, he saw a thatch of thick and red pubic hair.

God damn!

Not now a tiny voice echoed inside his head. Another alarm began screaming somewhere, and Dal knew he was in big trouble!

He headed for an alley.

And suddenly he saw the harsh, red lines of laser beams flare, forming a fence between the two buildings.

Why hadn't he noticed those before?

He skidded to a stop just short of the deadly bars of light! They were too high to jump, too low to crawl under.

He spun a quarter turn, and ran.

He rounded a corner, and almost ran into a trooper. Dal dropped and rolled, and came up holding his ceepee spitter in both sweaty hands. He fired, and the stream speared the trooper. The man fell, his own weapon discharging harmlessly into the ground.

Back! Go back, around the house!

As he ran by, he saw the woman, still standing in the doorway. She was smiling, her too-red lips glowing wetly in the hot sunlight.

Dal circled the house quickly—and found himself facing two more troopers.

They fired, and his jump was a

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fraction of a second too slow. He felt the burn of an energy beam along his left shoulder. Then he was rolling and shooting wildly. He got off four short bursts—one took a trooper in the groin, another the second man in the chest.

Up! Up! Move, dammit!

Another building. Maybe he could—no. More lasers!

He turned back. Where—?''

''WE HAVE THE PERIMETER SECURED!'' roared an amplified voice from a hidden loudspeaker. ''THE INTRUDER IS STILL INSIDE. WE HAVE THREE MEN DOWN.''

Trapped! Dal's mind scrabbled over itself, trying to think and not panic.

The house! It was his only chance. The red-head, she had to be the Lady Ursula. If he could take her hostage—.

But the door was shut, now. Frantically, Dal fired his spitter at the wood. It would burn—.

Too late, he realized the thick wood was backed with metal—probably hull-steel—and so, impervious to his particle weapon—!

The windows were too narrow, even if he could burn through in time.

There wasn't any cover, no place to hide—!

''ALL PERSONNEL VACATE THE ENCLOSURE! CLONE-DRONE APPROACHING!''

Oh, shit!

Dal heard the high-pitched whine of the aircraft, *there* to his right. He crouched, and point-shot the spitter. The thin green stream looked frail as it lanced out and touched the drone.

He gulped and dived to his left, hitting the burned shoulder.

The drone's laser roasted the ground where he'd just been—he could smell the cooked earth.

He rolled and fired again, holding the stud down, playing the charged-particles over the armor of the small, saucer-shaped craft.

The drone's laser flashed redly again, barely missing. As he dodged, he could feel the heat.

The drone pulled away in a lazy half-circle, and started back down.

He centered the sights of his spitter on the shining metal hull and held the stud, held it, held it.

And his pistol blinked out, dry, empty!

He was doomed, a dead man! He stood up and screamed, ''Fuck you!'' and threw the useless spitter at the drone.

And at the last second, the drone pulled out of its bullet-like power dive, and instead of a burning laser, a small missile erupted from its belly. It hit five meters away from Dal and exploded with a roar.

The force kicked Dal in the face like a giant boot, and the world blossomed red and faded away. . . .

To be continued

★ ★ ★

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THE-SUPER-DUPER-MAKE-YOUR-OWN-BABY-IN-A-TEST-TUBE-GANG

The problem of test-tube babies is nothing compared to the problem of test-tube mothers . . . !

By GUYANNE KUCERA

THE GRANT CAME through on April 5th and Dr. Fitzsimmons immediately chose the project's working team: Dr. Barrows, a longtime colleague (fussy but precise); Drew Adams, her lab assistant (a bit abrasive but with intuitive solutions); Cassie Page, a promising university student; and Clive Dicter, good at theory and a genuine talent for smoothing troubles.

The donors, all interns or students, had already contributed sperm and egg to the experiment, but before the actual implantation and viability started, the first thing on the agenda was the simple matter of a container.

"How about a glass test tube, only larger?" was the first suggestion.

This comment was met with shivers and negative headshakes as nuances of *Brave New Worlds* were hoped to be avoided.

"Too hard."

"Too cold and inflexible."

"Doesn't block light."

Dr. Fitzsimmon's voice cut through the turmoil, "One of the new stretch polymers should do nicely. The opacity would limit the light."

Clive agreed, "If we pack the inner bundle in a bed of foam there would be just the right amount of pressure surrounding the fetus and it should also help regulate the temperature."

"And pray tell how are we going to see into this dark and tepid atmosphere?" This from the fastidious Dr. Barrows, whose voice conjured an amazingly ac-

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curate vision of a nattily dressed little man forever straightening his bow tie.

"We could use one of the new heat emission cameras. It'd pick up the warm areas of the body and give us a fairly reliable visual picture. Along with the EKG monitoring system, we should be immediately alerted to anything if it went wrong."

"And what if someone runs into the bloody thing?"

Everyone but Dr. Fitzsimmons, who was aware of the seemingness of Adams casual attitude, was horrified. *The bloody thing indeed.* Clive broke the awkward silence: "Adams is right. We'll have to create something around the whole works for protection."

They all nodded, their minds diverted from Adams back to the problem at hand.

"How about a plastic cast? It could be in the same shape as a human pelvis and be sectional to facilitate delivery."

At these last words a small smile flickered from person to person, except for Adams, who was silently measuring the hips of Cassie Page.

★

Having decided this would be the best artificial environment possible, they spent the next few weeks working out the kinks. The end result ended up looking a lot like a huge sponge with myriad tubes and wires leading into it: If it was the closest approximation of a womb man could devise, it was in no way visually comparable.

So the solutions were mixed, the container filled, the wires hooked up, the temperatures obtained, and the beautiful experiment began.

The five of them stood looking at the strange apparatus in the middle of the room. Besides the heat emissions of the visual screen, they had hooked up an amplifier so they could hear the fetal heartbeat.

Cassie listened to the sound. "You know, I just thought of something. If we can hear it, it must also be able to hear."

Adams was quick to reply, "With all that stuffing around it? Hardly."

She glared at him. "I mean, it can hear it's mother's heartbeat. Probably can even feel vibration at this stage."

"She's right," Clive assured them. "An infant can detect it's mother's heartbeat at a very early age. It may even have something to do with the regulation of their own heart rhythms. Or it may be a security producing support system."

"Well", Barrows said. "What should we do?"

Adams glanced around, bored. "Why not just throw a clock in the hatch?"

Again he was met with general pandemonium.

Dr. Fitzsimmons quieted the group. "Adams may have a point. We could feed in a recording. As the fetus develops, it will be conditioned to an actual adult heart beat.

"Now", she surveyed the group "Whose heartbeat shall we

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record?"

Cassie muttered, "Not Adams, his only goes click-whirr."

"No," Dr. Fitzsimmons agreed. "It probably should be a female. I'm past child-bearing age, so I guess you'd be more ideal."

Cassie smiled and nodded. "I'd be glad to make a recording."

Clive objected, "Not just a recording, Cassie, an endless tape."

They all looked at him questioningly.

"A recording would be a repetition of the same beat. You all know heartbeats change throughout the day with stress, excitement or exertion. Cassie should record one day, then start a new tape the next day as the first one is fed into the life support system."

Barrows was becoming excited. "Of course. The baby will be receiving the real reactions of human heartbeats going through an actual day."

"Well, Cassie," Dr. Fitzsimmons glanced at her. "Are you still game?"

Cassie looked a little doubtful but nodded. "Should I take it off at night?"

"No." Barrows maintained. "Expectant mother's hearts beat in bed too. We must have an authentic recording in every way. That means we should have everything, even the heartbeat slowing down for sleep."

"Or speeding up," Adams injected, looking at Cassie's rather full figure, "Expectant mothers are known for doing other things in bed besides sleeping."

With this, the group was thrown into discord and dismissed for the evening. Dr. Fitzsimmons set about wiring Cassie to give her fairly complete freedom, yet make the equipment readily accessible.

★

During the following months, the tapes were switched each morning and fed into the fetal bath with only one mishap, when Adams accidentally (?) mixed up the tape and fed in a cassette of "Early Beatles Hits".

Clive, while monitoring the fetal heartbeat, noticed his foot tapping and finally recognized the tune.

"You've probably blown his ear drums."

"Aw, just getting him into the swing of things."

Dr. Fitzsimmons briskly changed the tapes and shook her head. "I hate to admit it, but in a way Adams is right again. Even an unborn child is influenced by his surroundings. We've provided nourishment, and rhythm but no movement. A pregnant woman, even confined to bed, would have some movement.

Clive looked doubtfully at the huge container and all the surrounding paraphernalia. "Maybe we could arrange a sling from the ceiling and lift it off the floor enough to swing it back and forth."

"Better yet," Adams injected, "put springs on the bottom and we could all get on top and pogo the little bugger all over the room."

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"That does it." Barrows removed his lab coat, carefully folded it and placed it on a chair.

Clive stepped between them, helping Barrows put his jacket back on. "Let's sleep on it for tonight."

"That won't do anything but flatten its little head," Adams muttered.

This time Clive nearly yanked the coat off Barrows.

Once again Dr. Fitzsimmons stepped in. "One problem at a time, please. We'll want movement in all directions."

Barrows agreed, "And a motorized propulsion system."

"We could even take it outside," Cassie added. "Perhaps to the park across the street."

"We'd need an elevator system. Maybe retractable ramps for getting up and down curbs," Clive added.

It was quiet for a second as they all looked at Adams expectantly.

"And one hell of an extension cord."

Four pairs of eyes flew skyward.

★

The next few days were spent reinforcing the outer shell, adding an elevator system, shelves for the monitoring equipment and a portable generator. By now the structure had grown to encompass half of the room and to get 'baby' out for his walk, the door and part of the wall had to be removed.

In the following weeks, the people in the park nervously anticipated the sight of a huge box exiting from the science building across the way followed by five people in lab coats: a small white-haired woman who led the group; a skinny long-haired lad who, with another mustached man, ran about checking dials and wires; a dark girl wearing a warm smile, and a tall fair lad with his arm around her, whispering to her and tapping on what appeared to be a mike taped on her neck.

Finally the day came when Dr. Fitzsimmons summoned them all to meet for the last time. "Our experiment has come to its conclusion. I would like to thank each and every one of you for your cooperation, your ideas and your time. You have all proved invaluable to this project. The fetus is full term and will now be transferred to the hospital for birth."

Cassie's long face looked close to tears. "We should have the birth here."

"No Cassie." It was one of the few times Dr. Fitzsimmons voice lost its professional touch. "We don't have the facilities or equipment in case something should go wrong. You know that, dear."

"But it's *our* child."

The voice regained its firmness, "It was our project Cassie, but never our child. If we kept him, he would be a curiosity with five parents."

"He'd be a hit at father and son banquets."

Fitzsimmons ignored Adams

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and continued. "This way he will be adopted by parents who know nothing of his gestation. He will be just another ordinary child."

They all nodded agreement.

"But I wanted a baby." Cassie murmured.

Adams poked her gently in the ribs, "Stick with me kid. I know how to go about it."

Cassie looked at him and then started to laugh. The others followed suit, tremendously pleased at their accomplishment; a team at last.

★

Dr. Fitzsimmons sat alone, putting the final touches on her notes and slowly surveying her surroundings. She had lost a promising student, who had quit to have a child.

The same student had married and mellowed a prize lab assistant, so he would probably lose his abrasiveness and be useless in future projects; half a wall of the lab was gone and the rest was cluttered with wires, tubing, sheet metal, plastic and machinery; a year had passed as if by magic; the people in the park had organized and were picketing the lab for scaring them out of their wits; and to top it all, she had post-partum blues.

She glanced down at the title on the report before her:

"Feasibility Studies On The Perfect Environment For The Gestation Of A Fetus."

She picked up a red pen, turned to the last page and beside the heading of *Suggestions,* scribbled in large capital letters:

USE ORIGINAL CONTAINER.

—KUCERA

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FEMWORLD:

before the revolution

A. E. VAN VOGT

A great writer's nightmare vision of Women's lib gone mad!

PETER GRAYSON, PH.D., physicist, vice-president of Haskett Manufacturing Laboratories, Inc., heard the peculiar tiny clicking sound twice in rapid order.

Ping . . . ping.

The print he was reading blurred.

Grayson shook his head impatiently and drew the contract closer to his glasses. Spots danced over the page. He sighed and closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he saw the problem.

In each lens of his spectacles, there was a crack horizontally across the "glass" exactly at pupil level.

He was startled. Both lenses broken within a half-second of each other. Being statistically oriented, he considered the probability of simultaneous breakage. The figures that leaped to his mind were astronomical, and of course impossible. He gave it up.

Silently, now, he removed the derelict spectacles, and laid them on the desk. Next, he searched in one of the drawers, and found a spool of transparent tape—naturally, manufactured by Haskett Laboratories. Obviously, he would use it only until he could obtain a new pair.

He replaced the tape in the desk, the glassess on his nose—as the door opened and Miss Haskett walked in.

It was her usual vital entrance. She smiled, and said, "Do you have a moment, Doctor Grayson?" Her repertoire gone, she sank onto a chair and waited with an air of death.

Grayson studied the owner of the Haskett Laboratories from behind his glasses and an astonishing thought passed through his mind. He ought to feel guilty about Miss

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Haskett. Her lonely life cried out wordlessly for love and affection. And who should answer that call but the man she had confirmed as chief scientist when she had inherited the business from her late aunt? Theirs was an office relationship. But it had involved most of her adult life.

Grayson cleared his throat, uneasy at the thoughts he was having. He was so intent on that he didn't notice the incongruity of what he did next.

He said, "Uh, Miss Haskett."

What he did not realize was the assertiveness of his tone. As if he were the employer, and she the employee. And she was evidently not thinking either, or was daydreaming. For she said in an absent tone: "Yes, Doctor?"

"What's the name of the eye specialist we use for our male staff?"

"Burr. Doctor Burr."

His thought shifted back to Miss Haskett. "What do you do in your spare time?" he asked.

"Oh—various things." She seemed alert, suddenly.

"Do you read?"

"Sometimes."

"Go to the movies?"

"Occasionally."

Grayson hesitated. An awareness was coming about what he was doing: Asking personal questions of his employer. He had not done that in all their previous association. He was startled.

Inside him, the withdrawal process was beginning.

At this point the woman volunteered, "I live in a condominium complex."

Grayson was startled by the import of the information. "Alone?" he asked.

Color came into her cheeks. She straightened. Then: "Alone," she said firmly. And did not look at him.

Grayson was silent. She had deliberately roused herself out of thirty-eight years of shyness to tell him that she had the facilities for an affair.

Grayson sighed. He was married, however drably. And he couldn't take the risk of his analysis being wrong. It would be ridiculous if he lost his job or got his face slapped, or—worst of all—*was hauled before an Utt commissioner.*

Thinking of that, shaken by *that*, he said urgently: "Miss Haskett, I seem to have damaged my spectacles. And I'm sure I don't have to tell you that for a male *nothing* is more important. So if you'll just hold what you were going to tell me—"

Haskett stood up. "It can wait." Suddenly brisk, vital again, she added, "Why don't I have Miss Broman call Dr. Burr, and make an appointment?"

"Uh, thank you." He spoke absent-mindedly because he was watching Miss Haskett as she went to the door. It occurred to him for the first time in their long business life that she had an excellent figure.

As the door closed, he realized that he had a forbidden male-type feeling; and that he should be experiencing strong guilt reactions.

But what he actually felt was a fear of being found out.

Trembling, he sat there in his private office in the scientific ad-

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ministrative section of Haskett Laboratories and began to feel better, because he decided that he was not really in danger. The dialogue of Miss Haskett and himself was gone into that voiceless universe of all the forgotten—because unrecorded—conversations between people.

She lives alone with her servants, he thought. So she will never mention it.

And I won't.

His anxiety began to fade.

His momentary lapse was behind him, receding further into the past with each instant.

He suspected what had happened had to do with the cracked lens of his spectacles.

The possibility was genuinely amazing to Grayson. Could it be that the Utt females were right? . . . On their arrival on earth forty years before, the matriarchal Utt had surveyed the human condition, and had diagnosed that the problems of mankind were all traceable to the male.

From the height of total superiority, their female rulers decreed that every male must take a certain drug at puberty. This drug rendered the male nearsighted.

Whereupon, qualified professionals, following Utt specifications, fitted men with spectacles. Something must have been in them. Because the lens, it was said, barred tiny portions of the visible spectrum from stimulating the male optic nerve.

Aside from requiring that all property be owned by women, plus certain transport limitations, and that women were not allowed to take scientific training—an unexplained restriction—that was the only direct Utt female interference in human affairs.

What bothered Grayson was that he had secretly dismissed the Utt analysis. He rejected, in short, the Utt concept that men were the villains of earth's tormented history. It all seemed far-fetched—made up.

Suddenly, he wasn't so sure.

He was still thinking about it when Miss Haskett knocked and entered. An unfortunate thing occurred. She gave him information about his appointment. But Grayson heard only the sound, none of the words.

He was intently observing the fact she was a good-looking woman. Absorbed, he watched her leaving the room. It was only after she was gone that he wondered, what did she say?

He was alarmed. The situation which he had thought solved, had had an unsuspected aftereffect. It could—it seemed—repeat with each visual contact.

It occurred to Grayson there was a simple solution. He must avoid seeing, particularly Miss Haskett, but possibly all women—until he had his new lenses.

Satisfied, he clicked on the intercom. "Miss Broman, will you repeat that about my appointment with Dr. Burr?" The appointment was for the next day. Miss Broman added quickly, "And Dr. Grayson—"

"Yes?"

"Miss Haskett asked me to tell you that the address of her condominium is 1818 Mendelian Drive."

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ONE LITTLE PLANET
SOVEREIGN
R. M. Meluch

In a universe where Earthmen and Uelsons battled for control of galaxies, what chance did Arana have for survival? But not only was this seemingly backward planet a fuel stop for space warriors—it harbored a new race of men, and the key to the ultimate struggle between mankind and man's most hated enemy...

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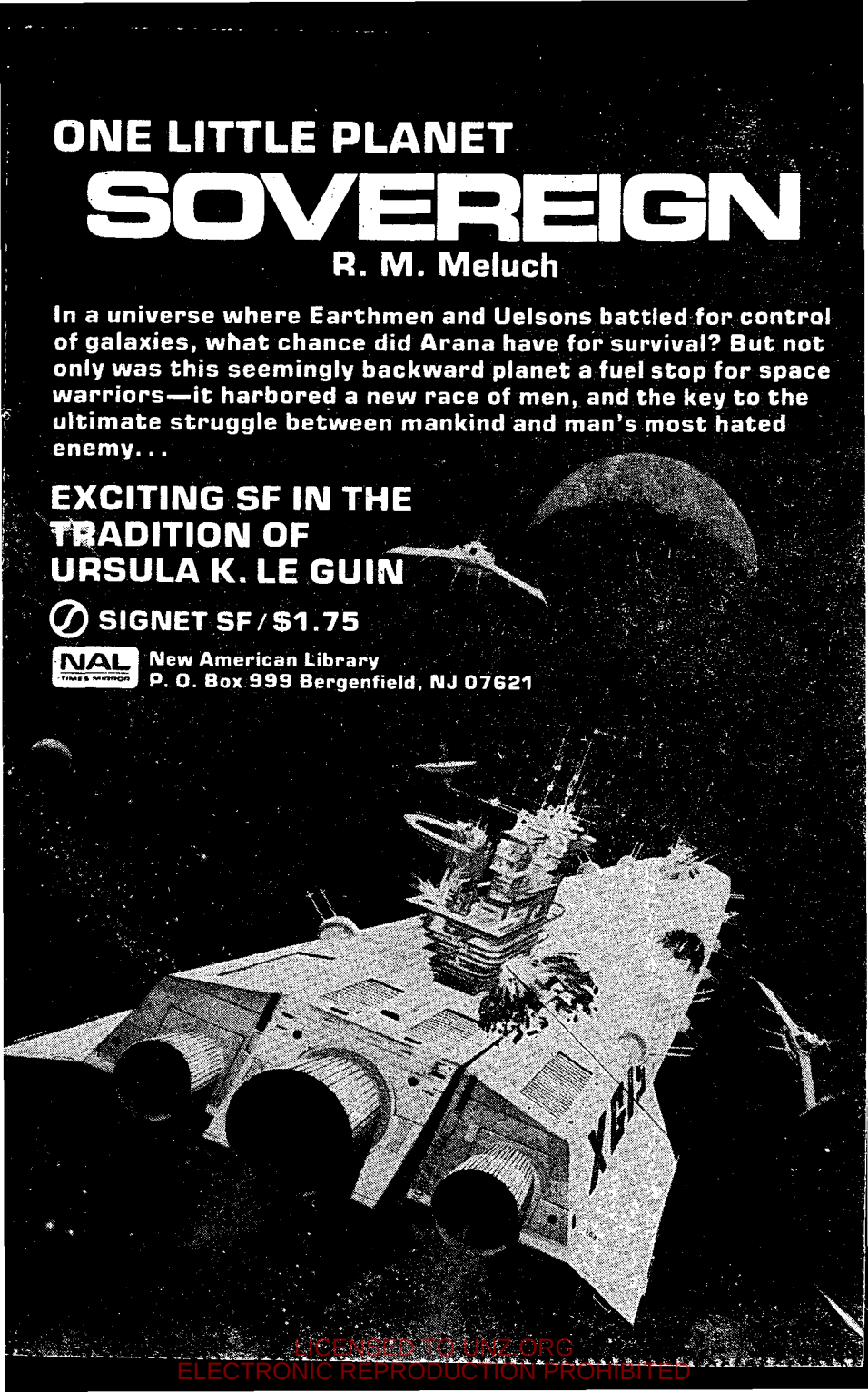

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Long pause. Finally: "Uh, Miss Broman, cancel my appointments for the day," Grayson croaked. "And tell Miss Haskett I'm going home this afternoon. I don't feel well. I'll go by the rear exit."

After a while, he was pleased to realize that he had kept his wits about him. First, deciding so promptly to go home, and, second, going out the sidedoor, he would evade passing Miss Haskett's office.

On the bus—one of the Utt transport limitations was men were not allowed to drive; an automobile was considered by the Utt females to be a violence potential instrument—he realized that his situation was not good at all. In his mind's ear, he kept hearing the seductive female sweetness in Miss Broman's voice.

One hope remained. After the lenses were repaired, his ability to hear the female voice with such responsive sensitivity would diminish again.

In short, he would cease to be vulnerable to the unsuspected madness which, he realized, had been lurking inside his skin exactly as the Utt females had unerringly observed in human males at the time of their arrival on earth.

★

Mila, his wife, was not in when Grayson entered the house. Which surprised him vaguely. He'd always had the impression that she never went anywhere during the day.

Probably out shopping, he thought. Satisfied, he put consideration of his wife out of his mind.

He went straight to his bedroom, placed his glasses away in his night table, and lay down. Utt law required a man to wear eyeglasses even while in bed—but, obviously, to do so with broken lenses would be tempting further damage to them, so . . . .

He slept. And awakened to a distant door opening and shutting. Mila, he presumed. There was silence. He pictured her looking at his hat and cane in the hall, aware that he was home. He visualized her instant unpleasant reaction.

But it was an hour before the door opened, and the rather tall, but slightly stooped woman who had been his wife for over thirty long years, came in and stood over him.

"And what is it *now?*" she said in her attacking tone.

It was eight years since his last illness and twenty-two years back to the time he had stayed home after hurting his hip in a severe fall—and in each instance he had remained in bed exactly one day. Yet he perceived that in her mind the intervening years were nothing compared to the mental anguish of his unwanted presence during those two twenty-four hour periods.

For the first time he had a glimmer of the enormous effect the Utt had had on wives. When man had been named as the Earth's trouble-maker, every woman became Ms. Unchallengeable.

Hastily, Grayson described his glasses breaking—then became aware of a strong chemical odor. He wrinkled his nose in distaste.

An amazing thing happened. His wife's shadowy figure, which had towered above him, sank down. Though it was difficult to see, Grayson had the impression that his

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wife was on her knees beside the bed.

And the odor was—if possible—even stronger.

Grayson sat up. "Mila! What's the matter?"

"Don't hurt me!" It was a whisper.

What stopped all immediate response by Grayson—his impulse to leap out of bed, his confusion, his feeling he must instantly go to her aid for some reason that wasn't clear—was the realization that the odor was a human body smell.

Mila's!

Memory wafted a startling explanation from his early laboratory experiments with animals. A female animal in heat had several times affected him unpleasantly. So much so that, finally, realizing that glandular exudations were actually too much for his sensitive nose, he had abandoned his primary interest in biology, and had gone over to the objective world of physics.

This smell *now* was like that animal smell *then*.

A woman in a profound state of sexual stimulation—

He lay back . . . : *She sees I'm not wearing the glasses that keep a man tamed,* he thought.

Because his brain worked rapidly, he waited, curious. If he told her after such a delay, there was no knowing what berserk state she would go into.

Then, he recalled the theory of such matters. A few minutes after a man took off his glasses, their effect wore off. His experience with Miss Haskett had certainly proved that.

He was assuming, of course, that broken lenses were the equivalent of no-glasses—

A male without glasses, said the legend, became progressively more aggressive, unreasoning, capable of violence.

To Mila, after an afternoon of no glasses, he must seem to be in some final stage of male insanity.

For Grayson, it was startling—he realized how strongly women of the old days must have responded to their men.

The woman beside the bed spoke again, in a whisper. *"What do you want? I'll do anything you say. Don't hurt me."*

"Take a bath," said Grayson, wrinkling his nose again, "and of course you won't be hurt as long as—" he hesitated, startled by his own temerity, but the words came involuntarily— "as long as you do what I say."

The woman came to her feet with alacrity. Her walk was not steady. There was the somewhat prolonged moment when she opened the door itself. Then the door closed.

Her bedroom was on the far side of the house, a choice of location she had made long ago. He assumed that she would now have time to recover her good sense. He recalled, uneasily, that a woman who felt herself threatened by a man could ask for instant help.

Yet when the door to his room opened again, he wasn't sure what state she was in. She wore her robe; that he was able to detect even with his weak vision. But—what else was not clear.

She came over to the bed, took off her robe, and lay down naked beside him. For long moments the

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surprise of that was a blankness. Then he felt himself automatically resisting.

For this woman, there was no response in him. Thirty years of abuse tightened his heart, and put a cold lump in his gut—Grayson was surprised at the intensity of his resistance. Normally, he didn't feel this strongly. He recognized that he was aware for the first time of his true feeling.

I could probably strangle this woman, he thought.

That shocked him. *Male violence really does exist,* he admitted to himself.

He fleetingly recalled their sexual past. Several times each year, Mila would go out with some female companions, and they would all get drunk. About two A.M. she would show up, an obscene creature with a tendency to throw-up, and demand that he engage in sex.

Naturally, and anxiously, he had always come through while she laughed, belched, and on occassion spat in his face.

In the morning, she showed no apparent memory of the event.

—But he didn't want her at such times, and he didn't want her now.

"Has Rosie said when dinner will be ready?" Grayson asked stiffly.

"She said we could eat any time we wanted," came a small voice from the bed.

"Oh!" said Grayson. He lay for a long moment, bracing himself. Then he got off the bed, turned on the light, went around to the night table drawer, got his glasses, put them on, and walked to the door.

There he paused, turned. "Better get dressed," he said gruffly, "and let's eat."

He went out into the hall.

★

By the time they sat down at the table, his wife's sallow face was red. She stared at her plate and did not look at him. That was disappointing. He was—he had to admit it—curious.

The truth was, he realized, he was ignorant and distrustful of Utt judgments, and craved information on which to form his own conclusions.

On the surface, it looked like men had caused all the problems. Because, after the Utt came, women changed.

A married woman, unpursued by her husband, was . . . normally . . . not interested in sex. There were reports (from certain salesmen) of exceptions. But the ordinary situation was drab. Usually a wife would have a child or two—no more. Since only women were allowed to own property, married women lived confidently. Grayson brought home a good salary from his job, all of which he handed over by law. She had household help. Her clothes and house were always neat, clean, and she herself wellgroomed. Sane, healthy, stable, she was the embodiment of a high standard of human being.

Except for one thing: the average wife was as easily angered after the Utt came as before. Only now she *really* felt free to express it. It was the one disturbing factor in a world where men were hard-working, peaceful, and kept sexually apathetic by a physiological method that

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was the law of the planet. For an unknown reason men in such a condition were never angry—

There was a sound at the other end of the table. Grayson's mind jumped out of its reverie. Mila was glaring at him. She spoke sharply, "Why weren't you wearing your glasses in the bedroom?"

He explained about not wanting to damage the cracked lens. "But of course, I kept my eyes closed. I was very careful not to upset the internal balance."

"Oh!" Some of the color faded from her cheeks and her lips compressed. The old signal of an imminent flare-up. He spoke hastily, trying to head off the explosion.

"What you did," he said, "tells us a great deal about pre-Utt relations."

There was a noticeable relaxing of anger as she said, "How do you mean?"

"Evidently, women offered sex to men out of fear."

"What are you talking about?" The sharpness was back.

That startled him. Was she pretending? Or was it possible she didn't remember?

Forgetfulness. Blankness. Her old pattern. As if it hadn't happened? That could be it.

But he was still curious, he realized, therefore frustrated.

"Has the fear faded?" he asked.

She had the expression of someone who intended to deny it. Then: "It was strange," she said, a faraway look in her eyes. "I suppose I should go to see the doctor."

Terror could have a profound physiological effect, Grayson presumed, correlated with shock.

"There I was," his wife continued, "suddenly faint and half-hallucinating." She added a ridiculing laugh. "I actually fantasized myself taking off my clothes, then coming into your bed, naked." She laughed again, and made an angry gesture with one shoulder. "A regression to my child-bearing state. We've had our children and our reason for copulating is twenty-five years behind us."

So it was going to be forgetfulness and denial, Grayson thought.

How amazing! In their courtship days, she had pursued him like a sex demon. The vitality she offered promised his enforced apathy would be completely overwhelmed by her inexhaustible need. *Before marriage, she forced sex as often as three times a day.* Afterwards—

Two days after the ceremony that, by Utt law, bound them together forever, Mila let him know that marriage was for companionship and bearing children.

Probably, gentler women like Miss Haskett lost out in the struggle for marriage because they were incapable of the insane premarital intensity which absolutely overwhelmed males subjected to it.

—Too soon to decide anything about that. Yet he felt a hardening inside him, which was a decision of sorts, barring Mila from his life.

After dinner Grayson went back to bed, *and in his fantasies visualized Miss Haskett in various exotic maneuvers.* There was a thought in his mind that said there was no danger now of being found out.

He could stand it no longer. He dressed and went out. His wife was sitting, knitting another of the in-

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terminable sweaters which she sent Mart, who was at college.

"Uh," said Grayson.

She did not look up, which was par. She had ignored him most of their married life and she was obviously not about to change.

"I'm going for a walk," said Grayson. "perhaps you'd like to come?"

That was his final hope of defeating the urge that moved him to what was obviously a forbidden adventure.

Something must have penetrated; she looked up, showed surprise. "Where are you going?"

"For a walk," he said.

"Oh!" Then: "No, thank you."

It seemed to satisfy her, for she settled back to the sweater. The last picture he had of her was of her sitting in the chair rocking back and forth.

Outside, the air was fresh, and he walked along with gathering confidence. A bus pulled up at the corner, and because he knew where he wanted to go, he climbed aboard without really considering the future.

He phoned Miss Haskett from a drugstore. "I happened to be in the neighborhood," he said, "and wondered if you'd care for coffee."

She sounded breathless. "Why, yes, Mr. Grayson. I—" She broke off. "Why don't you come up to my place?" She said, suddenly. "I'll have Joanne put the coffee on. No, I'll put it on."

When he got there he had no problem. Large trees, dim lights. *An ideal place.* From where Grayson stood on the porch, he could not see the entrances of the

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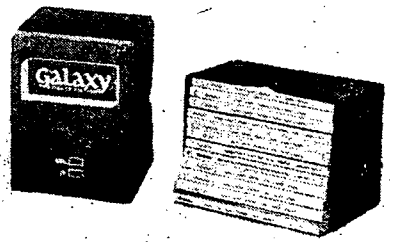

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adjoining apartments.

A single buzz was answered instantly. *A vision in white stood in the doorway.*

"It's nice of you to drop by, Mr. Grayson," she said.

Grayson blinked. It seemed to him she had made a quick change since his call. Or else he had misjudged this whole situation. "Were you on the way out?" he asked.

"Oh, no, I always dress up for myself at night," said Miss Haskett.

She held the door wider. Grayson walked in.

They drank coffee. Silence fell. She sat, empty cup in hand, on the couch. *The long skirt of her dress was drawn up primly against the leg nearest him.* Grayson placed his own cup and saucer on the coffee table, and took a deep breath. *It was either time to go or time to do.*

His heart pounded, his eyes blurred behind the mended glasses. He found himself reluctantly agreeing: *men really were the villains. He was clearly in a state of raging desire.*

Abruptly that shamed him. Unsteadily, he came to his feet. "Uh," he said, "uh, Miss Haskett, I want to thank you for this delightful—"

At that point, she set her cup down so quickly it hit the table and fell forcefully on its side in the saucer.

The sound was startlingly loud in what had been intense silence. Both the man and the woman involuntarily leaned forward to straighten the cup. His head brushed lightly against her hair. It was not real physical contact, but *in his whole adult life, Grayson had only touched one other woman.* And she had made that such misery—and so rare, that he no longer wanted to touch *her*.

It was several decades since he had been close to a desirable woman. *His hand reached for hers,* almost knocked the cup over again—but got hold of her fingers. Then he tugged her along from behind the coffee table.

It was a long coffee table and by the time he had her, his consciousness—conscience—surfaced. He let go.

"Very delightful," he muttered gloomily, stepping back, "but I imagine I'd better—"

Miss Haskett caught his sleeve. "You must see the rest of my home."

Grayson stiffened inside, he was a supremely analytical person and he saw this as a gesture of goodwill on her part. They toured the fluffy, very feminine makeup room. She explained things about it that Grayson did not hear because he was bracing himself. She took him into a huge bathroom. Special features required Miss Haskett to continue chattering. He did not hear what those special features were. *Something about an unusual method of maintaining the bath water exactly at blood heat . . . got through to him.*

And that one he promptly forgot as they came to a closed door. Grayson never remembered afterwards who opened that door. Did he leap forward or was he frozen in his singletrack thought—feeling—intent?

Whichever—the door was

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opened. The bedroom, large and expensive. Fluffy feminine atmosphere. *A queen-size bed he couldn't help noticing.*

Then they were standing beside it. Her voice, which had been virtually unceasing—ceased.

"Where's the light switch?" Grayson asked into the sudden silence.

"Over there." She pointed.

"Do you mind?" asked Grayson.

"Over there," she said, *voice coming up in pitch, a stricken sound in it.*

★

In the darkness, Grayson encountered the nude form of Miss Haskett, enthralled. Moments glided by. *Body touched body.* Lip pressed lip. Moments lengthened to seconds, seconds to minutes. Grayson told himself that Miss Haskett was in a class by herself. Most important, she was accepting him without any apparent reservation. Which, he had to admit, was pretty tolerant.

After all, *she was offering him a nubile, slender, well-formed, good-looking body.* In return, she was having imposed upon her a spare, gaunt male type with an aging face which fortunately was hidden in the darkness. Still, she must know what it looked like, and had made her peace with it.

He decided to tell her how grateful he was for her goodwill. He removed his lips from hers, intending to make the non-kissing extremely brief, just long enough to say a few kind words that would fit the occasion.

Momentarily, he paused. And, because he was always careful in his use of English, the moment grew long. And, abruptly, *the awful realization that his gratitude had diverted him and he was in serious danger of losing his ability to perform the act.* Instantly desperate, he fought to save the situation. There was no question about that either. It was a fight.

"What's the matter?" Miss Haskett whispered.

What could he say? He had virtually wrecked the moment by letting his mind wander to an unfortunate reality: *he was no longer a young man.*

As he had that despairing realization, he made a final, desperate effort to salvage the affair. And in a limp fashion, at first, succeeded finally to his satisfaction with one so comely—*and to his own surprise, apparently to hers.*

★

It was 11:32 as Grayson climbed aboard the bus that would take him home. At first, as he settled into his seat, the exhilaration and frustration of the evening alternately pulled him up and pushed him down.

But somewhere during the journey came his moment of confrontation:

He had taken an irrevocable step.

He waited for the shock of disaster to move through him.

But what he felt in its place was irritation. *He was a grown man, who didn't need advice from a Utt female or any other living person.*

The hostile reaction stayed with him all the rest of the way to his stop.

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The emotion had faded a little by the time he entered his house. Yet the prospect of running into his wife did not really shake him. And that was awesome indeed. A new thought. The idea of a man standing up to a woman's anger with anger of his own was . . . well . . . there was no clear reaction that he could produce.

But *he had seen her on her knees*. No matter what happened, *he would never forget the implications of that*.

Despite his strong attitude, he moved silently. And as he came to the final stretch, where there was no carpet, he took time to remove his shoes.

After all, he argued with himself, *why force problems where none need exist?*

In his bedroom, with its door shut, he undressed hastily and slipped into bed. As he lay there, then, reviewing the night's events, he realized that he was having still another and different kind of thought.

Part of his mind was busy plotting.

He was remembering what he had once read in one of those "awful example" stories, so common in the magazines in the days after the Utt females came.

This story had depicted a fifty-year-old managerial type much like himself. In the pre-Utt era—the story had stated—*such a man would have had half a dozen mistresses by his age*.

Grayson found himself feeling blank. The story (after his near disaster) seemed untrue. Miss Haskett, all by herself, almost had been too much for him.

Would he ever again, now that he knew he might fail, dare take a chance of disgracing himself?

With that . . . moral . . . thought, he must have slept.

★

The following morning Grayson ate breakfast alone as usual. The maid served him his usual meal and he ate hastily, worried his wife might get up and ask questions.

I'm not afraid, he told himself. *Let's just not have problems.*

Because he'd gulped his meal, he could catch his regular bus with time to spare.

The bus stop had its average scattering of sad looking males. *Everywhere Grayson looked reflected light from spectacles glinted back.* Eyes appeared distended behind thick lenses. It was very shocking to him now, for some reason.

As Grayson walked into the lackluster group, an automobile—starting from the curb fifty feet away pulled up opposite Grayson. The large, middle-aged woman inside leaned through the open window and said, "Miss Haskett sent me to pick you up, Dr. Grayson."

With unusual strength for a woman, she leaned all the way from the driver's side and pushed open the passenger door from inside.

Grayson was taken by surprise. "Miss Haskett—oh!"

He was appalled by his employer's indiscretion. Many of the men waiting here for buses were neighbors. He hoped they hadn't heard what the muffled voice from inside the car had said. As he

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scrambled in, his one thought was to get on their way before another word was spoken.

"Well, that was easy," said the driver. Only now he spoke in a man's baritone. *"Welcome to the revolution, doctor!"*

The car moved rapidly through traffic, which was light at this hour, consisting essentially of unmarried women going to work.

Grayson's shock at realizing he was in the presence of a male disguised as a female—subsided. And he began gaining data that would enable him to assess his situation.

"How long have you been driving a car in this disguise?" he asked.

"Long enough," was the reply.

"Never stopped for a traffic violation?"

"Once." The big "woman" shrugged. "Had to shoot the officer. Too bad—" The speaker broke off. "Which reminds me. That will be your first assignment. Getting yourself a pistol."

Grayson scarcely heard. He had realized that he was asking the wrong questions. And that, in fact, he had somehow been avoiding the crux of the matter.

He said now, boldly, "What is Miss Haskett's role in this?"

The large, pasty face with its artificial cosmetic coloring—to give it a womanly look—grinned. "You were at her place last night, right? We've been keeping an eye on you ever since we cracked your glasses with that high-frequency—well, never mind." Again the grin. "You made it with her, too, didn't you? That's what I meant—welcome to the revolution, doctor. When a potential recruit goes after a mistress within forty-eight hours—and has the gumption to carry it through—that's good enough. You're in, and there's no escape."

A pause. Mostly blankness. Striving to grasp the cruel implication.

It was painfully obvious that the other's hearty, jovial way of speaking concealed a chilling determination, which Grayson found himself automatically resisting.

He drew a deep breath, *after all he had a certain inner power. He was a PH.D., and a working scientist.* He said, "Let's not be too hasty. If you want my goodwill I suggest you try persuasiveness, and reason, and an end to threats."

Having spoken, he considered what he had said, and found it good. "That's my statement," he concluded.

The driver shook his middle-aged, womanly head, "Sorry, Doc, if you'll think about it, you'll see that we can't operate that way."

"You're *already* talking better," urged Grayson quickly.

The man ignored his interruption, "We can't operate that way because we'd have people who'd try to suck-up to the Utts. So I have to tell you. If we lose confidence, we kill you." He added quickly, "I don't have any feeling yet that we can't trust you, Doc. So don't be alarmed. But," gently—"We don't take chances. When in doubt—" He made a quick gesture across his throat with his finger. "You see how that has to be, don't you? You're a logical man."

And still Grayson resisted. He was like a man who had accidently walked into a thieves' hideaway,

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and as they very reasonably pointed out, they would have to kill him because they couldn't afford to have an outsider know. The logic was perfect. He just didn't wish to be a victim, or—in this instance—involved.

His reverie ended abruptly as, beside him, the man held out a card, and said, "Any time you want to reach us, here's how." When Grayson hesitated, the man shoved the card into his coat pocket.

Moments after that, the car drew up at the curb. "There's the Haskett factory. Okay, doc—out!"

Grayson climbed out, then turned, and said protestingly "Look!—"

The automobile gave a lurch. The "woman" leaned across the seat, pulled the door shut; and, as the machine picked up speed, waved—

In the course of the morning, the receptionist put seven calls through to Grayson. "Dr. Pudget on the phone—" she would say. Or, "The factory superintendant on the line—" "Can you speak to the buyer for Reid, Leigh, and Ufflegay?—" And of course he always could. Because the woman knew very well who he talked to and who could be, or should be, referred elsewhere.

He handled each call by making an initial effort to calm himself, and each time spoke in his usual practical fashion.

He began to feel a lot better.

He was aware of a hardening of his resolve. The truth was, he had been shown a way out from under Utt control, from under *female* control. And he had experienced the willing feminine body of one who seemed to welcome his attentions.

And both of these he would never forget.

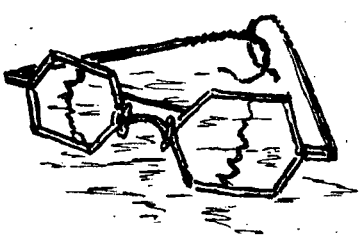
Women and Utts had oppressed men too long.

Now it could be man's turn again.

There were grievances to be paid for; wrongs for them to atone.

So he was a member of the revolution after all!

—A. E. VAN VOGT



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SF Hotline

HOLLYWOOD—In October *John Landis* started THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WOMAN. This stars *Lily Tomlin* in the diminishing lead and is a very loose remake of the famous 1950s film which was based on Richard Matheson's novel. The Landis-Tomlin film is a comedy, however, and John reports that the script is actually very good. Landis also directed SCHLOCK, THE KENTUCKY FRIED MOVIE and NATIONAL LAMPOON'S ANIMAL HOUSE. In SCHLOCK, he played the title role as well: a love-besmitten ape man. The monkey suit for that film was built by *Rick Baker,* who later built and wore the suit used throughout the remake of KING KONG; in THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WOMAN Rick plays a gorilla again. He's determined to make this ape suit the Ultimate Gorilla Costume, and when last heard from, was working out with weights to get a more gorilla-like physique. (An in-joke that Landis wants to pull off: his script has a scene requiring several scientists, and he wants them to be played by George Pal, Gene Roddenberry, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. At last report, Spielberg said he'd do it, if Lucas would.)

As for *Steven Spielberg,* he recently visited the home of *Forry Ackerman,* who says the young director was in seventh heaven. Spielberg has a complete set of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and joined the Monster Club when he was but a wee tyke. He told Forry that as of September 1st, he owned the screen rights to *Ray Bradbury's* "Something Wicked This Way Comes." That film has come very near to being made several times, most recently first by Sam Peckinpah, and later by Jack Clayton. Spielberg and George Lucas are planning

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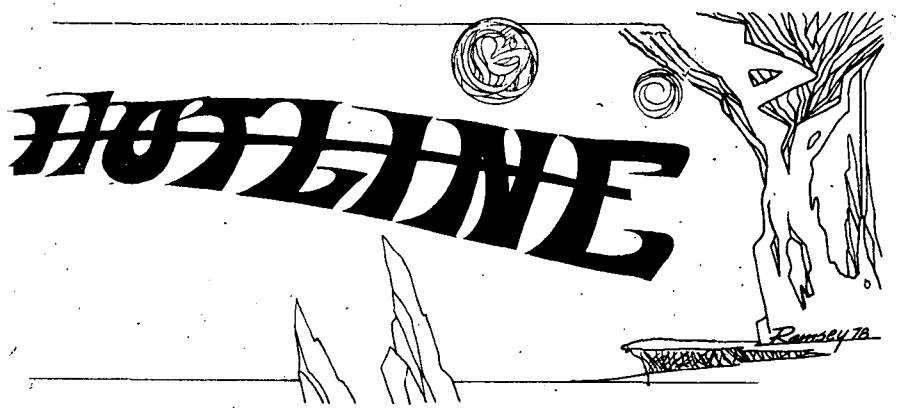

NEW YORK—According to the October 1978 issue of Penthouse, last year readers spent over *forty-five million dollars* on SF books and magazines. That's opposed to $1.5 million ten years ago. The total figure goes over two BILLION dollars, if you include movies, movie posters etc. These figures *don't* include lunch pails, dolls, blankets, and a host of other items with SF themes. Science Fiction is suddenly big business. SF visuals have been discovered by Madison Avenue and are being used to sell everything from pens to pantyhose.

The meaning of this to the SF consumer is clear. With 1979 looming as SF's most productive year to date with over 1000 new titles in the works, it's becoming clear that the SF boom is here at last, as this month's column amply demonstrates.

★

Robert Aspirin will have a novel out from Starblaze, MYTHECONCEPTION—it's the sequel to his first book for Starblaze, ANOTHER FINE MYTH. St. Martin's will publish another novel, THE BUG WARS. Both will be on the stands in January.

F. M. Busby is working on the sequel to RISSA KERGUELEN. It will be shorter than RISSA.

David Gerrold is doing a trilogy, THE WAR AGAINST THE TOR, for Quantam.

The Securities and Exchange Commission has taken CBS to court on anti-trust charges to force divestiture of Fawcett. Popular Library

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HOLLYWOOD *(continued)* . . .
to make a major science fiction film together, but haven't let anyone in on what it is. I suppose it's possible that it's the Bradbury property. Spielberg is also working on the script of the sequel to CLOSE ENCOUNTERS, but is being cagey about the subject matter. Piecing together what clues I have, I wouldn't be surprised if it had something like the structure of GODFATHER II—some scenes in the past, in which Lacombe has his first close encounter, plus some scenes in the present following the further adventures of Roy Neary on his voyage with the extraterrestrials. Then again, I may be way off-base.

I'm definitely not off-base in saying I know a good deal of the plot of the STAR WARS sequel, currently being called THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK! Since I came by accurate information legitimately, yet respect the wishes of Lucas *et al* not to let the plot out too soon, I'm torn. I will say: *Princess Leia* falls in love with one of our heroes; *Luke* gets a new teacher—of sorts; *C3PO* has an accident; there will be relatively few scenes in space; and if you like the stop-motion animation monsters of Ray Harryhausen, the first third will appeal to you very much.

Speaking of *Ray Harryhausen,* his next film was to be about Perseus, from commissioned paintings by *Cathy Hill,* but his American financiers seem to want him to make another Sinbad film. After the last one, SINBAD AND THE EYE OF THE TIGER, which wasn't much of a movie, I'm really sad to see Harryhausen squander his talents on old stuff like that.

John Milius (THE WIND AND THE LION) may be directing the CONAN film, to star *Arnold Schwarzenegger.* The script at this point is, as far as I'm concerned, unsatisfactory. Milius is also planning to include a few vague fantasy elements (mythical or prehistoric beasts glimpsed in the distance) in his proposed film on mountain man Jedediah Smith. Milius original script for JEREMIAH JOHNSON was quite different from what he has proposed for Jedediah Smith (who founded my home town)—which he describes as a *Frank Frazetta Western,* as opposed to the usual Frederic Remington Western.

If you have film news, contact me at 2150 N. Beachwood Dr. #4, Hollywood, CA 90068. **—Bill Warren**

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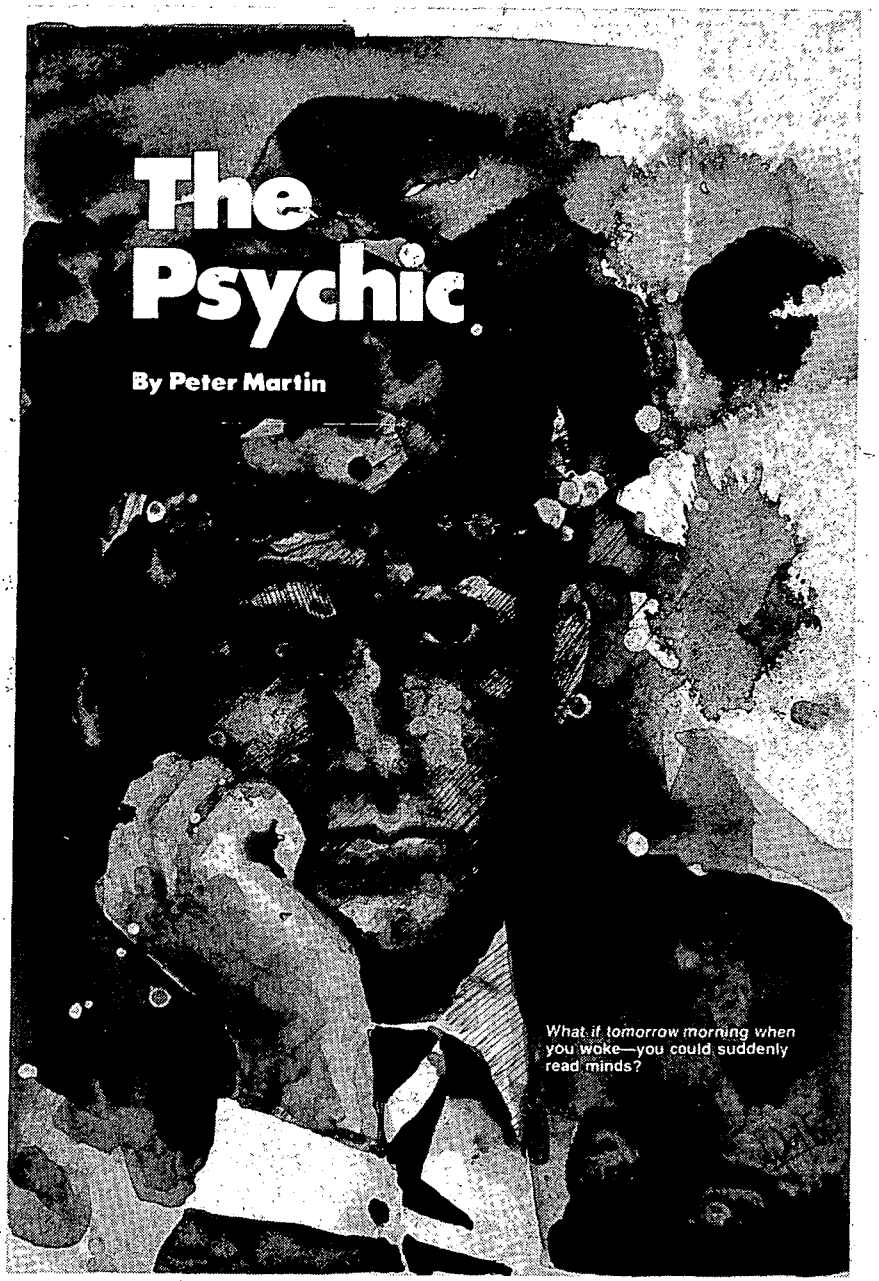

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"YOU CAN'T pussy-foot around dollars-and-cents facts, McBride!" T. J. Fawcett waddled in a half-circle in the center of the office. Ohio River Power's administrative VP was throwing a snit, waving his arms and shouting, sagging face and jowls trembling. "The facts say that we can't pay four times as much to clear filth because a handful of back-hollow dirt farmers make a fuss. Grow up! It's cheaper to pay damages, allowing for the increased PR required, than to go back to clearing rights-of-way by hand. When are you going to learn not to let nobodies do your thinking?"

Fawcett sat down, turning an unctuous half smile on old Davidson, ORP's president and still nominal general manager.

Wondering how such a colossal old shit ever got so far as a vice presidency, Cliff McBride gathered wits and patience for another try at making sense for Davidson. "Gary, there's more at stake than just the money, or clearing these rights-of-way. The people *know* the stuff is dangerous, and that goes for more than the few farmers who have lost trees or even orchards. Another PR campaign isn't going to bring back those crops, neither is paying damages. Some farmers have been wiped out by Weedex. We could save that PR money and more, if we could cooperate with the farmers who have trees or watershed to their trees on these line and cable routes."

"We've got trouble enough with environmentalists over this 2,4,5-T without adding more campaigners to their ranks. Let's clear a few riskier routes by hand if that's what it takes, and get people back on our side for a change." Cliff wiped a hand across his wide brow, gave old Davidson his appealing, perplexed look. But Fawcett was on his feet.

"Dammit, boy, public relations isn't your responsibility. *Your* responsibility is to follow your instructions and get those rights-of-way sprayed so we can get on with building a power plant." The bloated administrator turned to the president with a pained expression on his face. "PR is ad*min*istrative responsibility. Ope*ra*tions wants out of the inconvenience of dealing with a few snivelling hillbilly farmers and a crew of lazy pilots who'd rather bitch than fly!"

To the president's credit was the transparent, bony hand he raised, warding off Fawcett like a predator.

"Siddown, T. J. McBride, can't you get your boys back to work? This stopping work for every little complaint—ah-hemm. . . . The . . . mmm . . . *policy* is already established. This stuff you're spraying hasn't been *proved* destructive to their trees. It's the spray all the other companies use, and we've got a right to treat our line and cable routes. Why make an expensive change the Board won't be happy with? One we've paid thousands to avoid?" The hollow-cheeked old man looked up at Cliff for the first time since he came into the office an hour before. "Get 'em back in the air, son. Any way you can, himm? You can handle it."

"What do I tell the media, the farmers and the environmental action people who are going to storm my office the minute we get one chopper in the air?" Now Cliff was

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on his feet, jaw jutting.

"Nothing," snapped Fawcett. "Just do your job without dragging Mr. Davidson into your petty problems—and *stay the hell out of public relations!*"

★

The farther from Davidson's office Cliff McBride got, the madder he got. How *could* he let that grotesque old buzzard call him *boy*? It was like the go-arounds with Katherine before the divorce; by the time his feelings caught up with his head, the opportunity was past, and he wound up with a dozen things to say and no one to say them to. By the time he got to Operations, he was fuming at himself. He pushed the door to the suite open forcefully and stormed through reception, ignoring Sally's greeting and smile.

Beth Burkhammer, Cliff's secretary, saw his face and rose with a quizzical look. "Fawcett? Or the farmers?"

"Both," he said with a sudden release of tension. He wished he knew how she got him to relax just by understanding things without explanation. He'd come to think of Beth as his girl Monday years ago when he was a plant super and she ran his office. Now he was glad she was in the operations office, with her understanding and efficiency. She had on coral wool, perfect for her tallish figure and April weather. Her brown-blonde hair fell forward over her knotted brow, pointing out her look of concern.

"Idiots," she said, following him to his door. "Fred Dutton is waiting with final printouts on Clay Ridge."

"Beth, can you get Bob Hendricks up here? One way or another, we've got to get that clearing done up on Yellow Creek."

"Right." She turned to her desk.

Fred Dutton was asleep in Cliff's chair, feet on the desk. Cliff picked up the sheaf of printouts and sat in the other chair, scanning the data. Finding it was going to take more study, he dropped it on the desk with a thud.

"*Huh?* Hi, Cliff. How's it going?"

"Don't ask. Fawcett pitched a fit about using hand labor up on Yellow Creek, but he's full of it."

The wiry little data processing whiz who was ORP's chief accountant since computerization stretched and got to his feet. "You go over the printouts, I'll talk to you about budgeting. New estimates for the Board; they don't like surprises. Hell, PR alone is over by something like 300%, since the high sulphur exemptions came through for Clay Ridge."

"PR," spat Cliff. "What crap. Fawcett thinks it's the answer to everything. Try to get a few bucks for hand-clearing so the farmers don't lose what trees they've got left and he acts like it's out of his own pocket. But not P-stinking-R! Spend the world trying to convince the public we're doing them a favor filling the air with sulphur dioxide and the ground with 2,4,5-T. It's *backwards*, Freddie!"

The buzzer sounded on his desk and Cliff pressed the tab. "Yes?" Fred circled the desk, making room for Cliff.

It was Sally in reception. "Hen-

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dricks is here, sir."

"Send him in." Cliff sat down, wondering if there was going to be a solution to *anything*. Fred stopped, the door open, and asked, "Tennis after?"

"Sure." The two had been regulars at the indoor courts all winter, since the demands of the new coal-fired plant at Clay Ridge made it obvious they weren't going to get any skiing.

Bob Henderson came in as Fred stepped out, and Cliff gave another sigh and wished he'd never heard of Weedex.

★

The Spartan was not Sparta, Ohio's most exclusive or expensive club, but it had an admirable dining room and was the only one with a bar *and* an indoor tennis court. Dutton and McBride made a fair match for beginners. Had the two been less enthusiastic they would never have attempted the second set. But no one was waiting, and they were having an intense, if frustrating, savage kind of fun.

Fred had a rolling, pitch-faced serve that had good speed and incredible topspin, so that Cliff had to scramble. Cliff compensated by leaning back and getting arm and shoulder into powerful forehand returns, keeping the base-line play hot. By the middle of the second set, they were streaming sweat into sodden whites and panting, growing a bit wild.

It was on an exchange of charges to the net that Cliff fell. He lofted a ponderous backhand over Fred to pull him off the net, and charged to cut off the return. When Dutton saw that, he hit a little blooper short into the corner that just cleared the net. They figured it was a little pool of sweat that made Cliff slip, and fly headlong into the steel post that held the net.

Fred leaped the net and turned Cliff over, frantically fingering the carotid for a pulse. It was fluttery, and he had to probe for it.

★

Continuity crept back to Cliff McBride's consciousness through the blinding, clear white sight-sound confusion of limitless awareness. Long before he came to himself, he came to perception. He perceived feeling below him, knowing above. Seeing, hearing, and understanding were all in between, and he perceived a flow between them all, colored streams of light with globules of contrasting color in them, coursing like blood cells in an off-color fantastic journey. With perception of light and color came the lightshow.

Vivid discs of colored light, fiery orange, then deeper red, oscillated and alternated with deepest green. Green deepened to gold that whirled and glowed with the light of a million suns, then faded to a silvery pinpoint surrounded by a blue sparking effervescence that expanded and intensified and shaded to rose-yellow, sweeping bars which spun in dazzling display.

Then gleaming white faded to meaninglessness and pervaded Cliff's consciousness totally, contracting to a central ball of white with twelve spinning gold bars sur-

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rounded by a thousand rays of different colored, radiant light. The thousand-rayed sun spun, shooting contrasting sparks in all directions, an indescribable, achingly and captivatingly beautiful mandala.

Then he reached for or was attracted to the sun, and, somehow, he was soaring up towards it, through it, and then was where he could see connected starlets of light, seven tiny constellations gathered around him, each connected by glowing globules streaming from star to star. He floated above these star clusters, each different, yet each had a bottom star, fiery orange to muddy brown, each a top that was a giant rainbow chromatoscope with a white center whirling with yellow-gold spokes.

Slowly, he settled toward a brighter, more vivid constellation that lay horizontal beneath the others. He entered the horizontal starself at the sunbright six-rayed third star from the bottom and instantly rose-hued electric streams shot through him. Orange and red arcs with purple striations flowed downward, bringing awareness of lower limbs and organs. Oval globlets surged upward in a yellow stream to his heart and he felt it beating, pumping the vitality outward.

Then one of the blue electric streams touched the redhued star at his solar plexus. Twin rays, one of clearest blue and the other lustrous violet, arched outward and upward from it, to a star at his throat, and rose in indigo irrevocability toward his head.

White, undifferentiated sound welled up within him again, the all-in-all of randomness raised to infinite power. Then slowly, so slowly, it faded into the babble of all the voices of all time, telling it all together in one ageless time of speaking.

Smells and pungent tastes and a vague, abstract sensation of heaviness impinged, and coalesced into a red-black hammering, a pulsating pressure, sightsoundsense, that pounded in rhythmic inevitability in the astonished and bedazzled brain of Clifford Jackson McBride.

He was himself, and he had all the headaches of his life crammed into one blinding, thud-whamming killer pulsation of the cranium. With each heartbeat a pulse of brilliant, pure lightsound perception burst within his stunned consciousness with the size and intensity of a star. He retched, gagged, and soon hands were turning, raising his body and he was aware of sickening motion through the thunder in his skull: Cliff opened his eyes,

Fred's face, close and wide-eyed with shock, radiated violet-blue in all directions, and Cliff squeezed his eyes quickly shut again. A hundred-rayed burst of light shone where Fred's head had been. The star divided horizontally, rose and yellow above the center, blue and purple below. As Cliff watched, stunned, the dividing interface curved slowly into an S-shape and began to rotate. Unbelieving, he opened his eyes, and there, above him, was Fred's very worried face, still surrounded by its silver-blue aurora.

Cliff blinked, but the illusion remained. Fear, sharp and compelling, made him close his eyes again, only to restore the whirling

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yellow-purple star. He opened them again, near panic, and the star disappeared, but the deep blue halo still surrounded Fred's face.

Stirring, Cliff tried to speak, but the sound was a dry croak in his throat. He moved a hand in front of his face, it obscured Fred's head and was familiar. But it too was surrounded with bluish light. He studied the hand, and saw that the light began a half-inch from his skin.

He stared at its now near-violet corruscations, wondering what could be wrong with his eyes. Then the throbbing returned, and a red shift overcame all other color in his sight and he sagged heavily, all perception focused involuntarily on the excruciating throb of his head.

★

The nurse was glad to find Cliff awake in the dim hospital room, but impatient to be done with him. Her glow was reddish all over with sexual excitement. *How can I know that?* Her rounds were nearly done and she would meet *him* in the laundry room. *But this is crazy. Not only is my vision messed up, but now I'm having thought-hallucinations.* The overhearing was so effortless he hadn't for a few moments realized it was her thoughts in his mind.

Cliff looked carefully at her ruby sheen as she leaned over with the blood pressure cuff. She was thrumming with sexual anticipation. A nude, tanned young man substantially endowed appeared in his vision and was gone. *Now that's ridiculous! I must be whacko from banging my head.*

The thought brought the reality throbbing back to life and he tentatively felt the top of his head. There was a good-sized lump, but no bandage. It was painful to the touch, but the throbbing was now bearable. A dull ache filled his head. He looked at the nurse who was busy with his arm.

"How . . . how long have I been here?" he asked.

"One nineteen over seventy-four." She made a note on something and removed the cuff, taking his wrist and looking at her watch. "About four hours. I'm counting." She finished and made another note, stood and turned to go.

Unable to resist, Cliff said, "What's his name?"

"Lance. And he's . . . oh, you go to hell." Her flush matched her reddish aura. She left.

So she did have a man on her mind. So what did that prove? Did it explain the red light beaming from every inch of her body? Did it explain how he saw the man as she must have seen him? Was this whole thing some kind of delusion caused by the blow? Cliff lay back against the pillow, turning these thoughts over and over in his mind.

★

The doctor's aura was green. He was glad to see Cliff conscious, though Cliff would have debated the issue if he hadn't been fascinated and more than a little alarmed by the emerald glow around the man's youthful, unkempt body. He was thinking about concussion, cerebral hemorrhage, and deep muscle

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suturing techniques, the latter for this morning's lecture. *There it is again! Am I dreaming this, or what?*

"Doctor . . . why am I seeing colors?"

"Colors?" There was interest in the unshaven face.

"Well, I . . . I'm seeing colors around everybody. You are green, or at least there's green shimmering around your body. The nurse's body was surrounded by red. Could concussion do that?"

"Could, I suppose, though. . . . Describe the lights."

"They're . . . well, they start just a little way from your skin and radiate outward about this far, then thin out at the edges. The color's very vivid and it seems . . . electric."

"Hmmm." The doctor tipped Cliff's head up for a close look. His pencil flash shone into first one eye, then the other. "We have seen some visual phenomena associated with hemeralopia, or day blindness," he said. "And, I suppose it could be a temporary effect of the injury. I wouldn't worry about it. You have a mild concussion, but I don't see any real danger signals. If there are no changes, you can go on home in the morning."

He stood, thinking about finishing his rounds and his suturing notes for the morning class. "I would," he said, "definitely avoid tennis or any other strenuous activity for a few days. Can you sleep without medication? It's really better with recent concussion, especially with unusual symptoms."

"I think so." The scruffy young doctor withdrew.

★

Fred was fringed with purple and green when he came into the room. Worry and good will emanated from him so tangibly Cliff could feel their warmth physically, as though absorbing them through his skin. Beth came behind, wearing a print dress obviously chosen for its cheeriness. Cliff wondered why he saw no aura around Beth. Fred's concerned, guilt-laden thoughts were clear to him, but he had no idea what Beth was thinking. She stood there trying to smile. Fred broke the awkward silence.

"So how you feeling?" He grinned, masking his fear and guilt with effusiveness. He sat on the end of the bed, but Beth hovered, standing.

"I'm okay. Doctor said not to worry. I've got a funny thing with my eyes, but he said it would go away. Concussion. Doesn't much hurt now. How did it happen?"

"Cracked your noggin on the net post. Scared the shit out of me. Your eyes looked funny, rolled up. Sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, except for. . . ."

"Well *I* think you're both fools!" Beth was red in the face, a bright contrast to her green eyes. "Playing so hard you knock yourselves out at a game that's too strenuous for men your age. Think about your heart, let alone getting hurt. You should have more sense."

Cliff tried to probe her thoughts. *Nothing.* Why should she be so worried? Sure, they had been friends through their long association at the power company, but this was the first time she had ever

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acted like this. He wished he could tell what was going on in her mind.

Quickly, Cliff changed the subject. "Henderson have any trouble getting the choppers back in the air?" He pulled himself up on one elbow, then sat erect to show he wasn't really hurt. A lie.

"For about twenty minutes," Fred said. "According to Bob, they came back to the field saying if he was so goddamned hot to get that spraying done, he could do it himself. They weren't going to get shot at for anybody."

"Shot at?"

"Farmers," said Beth quietly. "Deer rifles and shotguns. Bob didn't know what to do. The pilots were scared silly."

"Anybody hurt? What about the equipment?"

"No, no injuries and no damage. Just bluffing, I suppose."

Cliff turned back the cover, put his feet on the floor and remembered he hadn't a great deal on. "Let's get down there," he said. "Fred, get somebody to check me out and bring me my clothes. Beth, call Bob and tell him to meet us at the maintenance yard. Tell him to bring all the laborers he can round up without delay, and—"

"Whoa!" Fred pushed him gently but firmly back onto the bed. "You aren't going anywhere until the doctors say it's okay. I'll check with them, and Beth can make the call. But someone else can meet Henderson. Relax."

★

They worked out the details when the two came back to his room.

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Henderson could send crews in to cut the Yellow Creek right-of-way by hand, and Fred could route the expenses through emergency maintenance. Land subsidence, they decided, with enough exposed cable to require extensive hand labor. They could get the pilots back to spraying, but in another area. Being able to overhear much of Fred's thought made the planning go quickly, often leaving Beth lost in the leap from notion to second or third level ramification. At last they agreed, and the pair went off to enact the plan themselves, insisting that he should rest.

★

Rest was slow in coming. Cliff struggled with the implications of his hallucinations and his eavesdropping on minds. When he closed his eyes, a waterfall, wide and frothy, poured over the blackness of his vision. He blinked it away, wondering *what the hell*, and it was replaced by a truck, a monster semi, roaring past the brickyards. The sight of the truck filled him with terror and hatred, and he opened his eyes, trying to will the image to disappear. It persisted even with his eyes open, drawing closer and closer, lumbering down upon him. When it finally roared past, he collapsed back into the bed with a sigh.

New images filled his mind. A fluffy dog, crying; two women whispering dark secrets he could not understand; knives and chairs and filing cabinets and data display screens and doors behind doors behind doors, each seeming to contain wisdom but opening on another door. He sat up again, batting at the images with his hands. He was about to ring for the nurse and ask for something to help him sleep when he heard the scream.

High-pitched and achingly intense, it was the scream of a woman's sheer terror. *Could all this be some kind of delusion—starbodies and color tricks and mindreading and visions like flights of birds around my head, and the screaming? Rattled. I'm addled by the concussion, and the hemeralowhatever.*

With introspective came respite. The scream was gone and the images with it. Exhausted, he was asleep almost immediately.

★

The second scream awoke Cliff McBride before dawn, spine-chilling in its urgency, and so long that he was sitting upright, hands clapped to ears before it subsided. *A dream, he thought. It has to be. Nothing so bizarre could be real.*

Bits of sentences came in his mind then. Secrets half-whispered in a dozen voices, some with faces in varying focus, some without. The starbody vision faded in and out of sight, giving the broken urgencies of thought a transitory, dreamlike quality. Cliff thrashed in the bed, playing over and again the fears and anguish, the shattered hopes, the horrors and humiliations of a hundred desperate lives.

At light he awoke to another scream, head pounding, pulse racing, bed soaked with sweat. It felt to Cliff as if his mind had torn with

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the screaming, and through the gap came visions to shame his dreams. Silent, raging faces, scenes of which he had no memory, voices crying, mumbling, shouting and speaking all at once.

With the desperate fury of his rage against the fate that had cast him in this role, a fury not equalled since the death-throes of his marriage to Katherine, Operations Manager Clifford Jackson McBride held his head in his hands and wept—he had not since childhood.

★

Beth drove him to the office around ten. She'd wanted to take him to his apartment, but there was far too much *nothing* there for safety. He wanted activity, people, usefulness to fill his confusing time. The halo phenomenon continued, on nearly everyone but Beth. She was opaque and solid, a steady image in a world gone unstable. She coddled him, anticipated his needs, and kept the routines moving in the office and the department. The tale of the bump on the head had to be repeated for others who stopped by for a chat. He studied the modifications analysis and procedural schedules for Clay Ridge. He still had the impression of sensing what was going on in others' minds, but he avoided thinking about it, throwing himself into work as an escape. To an extent, it worked.

Henderson came in at four-thirty with a progress report on Yellow Creek. It was half-finished and they could be out by Saturday. But word had leaked to Fawcett, and the VP wanted to see Cliff right away.

Fawcett, damn his eyes! A foreboding tingle came to Cliff's mind, but he thrust it off with his hatred.

★

The office above Cliff's was nearly as opulent as that of the president. Fawcett's desk was neat as a pin and behind it he sat, scowling as Cliff came in and took a chair.

Cliff could see the reddish brown, murky aura, and behind the baggy, limpid eyes, a glittering, spinning vortex of images. He stared, slackjawed in disbelief, at the flickering thought images of the vice president.

"You had to do it, didn't you?" The pendulous dewlaps shook with anger. "Get yourself a nice quiet little hand crew up on Yellow Creek, against Davidson's orders—not to mention my own. Who the *hell* do you think you are? . . . No answer? I thought not. It won't wash, McBride. Insubordination, even at management level, is a dismissal, and I intend to see that Mr. Davidson and the board get a full report of . . . this preposterous effrontery. . . . What are you staring at?"

Cliff managed a smile. "Your thoughts, T. J. Your petty, supercilious, self-aggrandizing, avaricious and cynical old man's thoughts. They're disgusting."

"You must be out of your mind. Thoughts! I'd think you would take this *seriously,* boy. Now you listen to me—" But Cliff was on his feet, fists clenched, jaw set.

"I don't give a lineman's fart! You stick public relations and pur-

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chasing and your petty power plays right up your administrative ass, and let me get the work done. What the hell is it to you, anyway?''

Fawcett's mental images came suddenly clear. Cliff saw a small man in a sharkskin suit handing rolls of cash to Fawcett. He saw purchase vouchers and invoices and delivery receipts all arranged in careful order, and every one of them fraudulent. Bills for goods and services never delivered. Checks to a dozen different companies, each cashed at a different local bank by the same man with a mole beside his nose. And he saw the scheme.

Simons was the man's name and he had carefully compiled a dossier on Fawcett and others. Cliff saw bedroom scenes in polaroid squallor, each featuring Fawcett and a different woman. The postures of the polaroid couples were pretty kinky. Simons' investigation had started out as a divorce case, and had wound up more profitable than expected. He was pumping Fawcett, and who knew how many others.

''*Everything* in this company is my business, McBride. And impertinence is going to cost you. You don't know the first thing about administrative work, and it's beginning to look like you can't handle operations either. Now get out of here and get that crew recalled—''

''How much is he into you for, T.J.? And how much of it have you chalked up to Reddy Kilowatt?''

''What? What are you talking about? Get out of here and get those crews back where they belong.''

''Right. Sure. Go fuck yourself. On camera.''

''GET OUT!'' Cliff got.

★

''Thanks for coming over, Fred; I know it's late. Chair. Coffee? Beth, if you will, and you take a chair too, huh?'' Fred was puzzled, his bluish aura subdued. He had come right up when Cliff had called a little after five.

When coffee had been served, Cliff wiped a hand across his brow.

''Two things. One makes no sense at all, the other only too much.''

Fred shifted, glowing to Cliff's eyes with now clear blue light. His mind was calm, clear, intent.

Beth, still the exception to his new-found abilities, sat primly, hands clasped in her lap.

''It's . . . it's crazy. I . . . I can . . . well, at least it seems to me that I can read some people's thoughts, feel their feelings.''

''You mean like telepathy?'' Beth asked calmly.

''Read *minds?*'' Fred was agog. ''You mean like those experiments at Duke?''

''Well . . . sort of. Ever since that thump on the head yesterday, I've been seeing and hearing the strangest things. You, Fred, you have a blue halo around your body that completely mystifies me.''

''Aura?'' Beth again. ''As in astral body? As in Madame Blavatsky? Cliff, that's marvellous. I've been fascinated by psychic phenomena for years! What does it look like?''

''It doesn't seem to work with everyone. Just sometimes, and almost always with some people, like Fred.''

''Look,'' Fred suggested. ''If this

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is true, we can test it. What am I thinking right now?''

Cliff stared at him, searching for the flickering display of thought-images, but couldn't see it. The blue glow was sustained, but nowhere in it could he find Fred's thoughts.

''I can't. Maybe it has to do with pressure, or feeling or something. But when it happens, I know it. The nurse in the hospital was . . . I could read her perfectly. And the doctor, I could hear him making mental notes on a lecture he was going to give. Don't think I'm imagining all this. I have trouble with that myself as it is. I about decided I was losing my mind, or had brain damage from the concussion.''

''The human aura,'' Beth put in, ''is a testable, demonstrable biolectric phenomenon. Kerlian took pictures of it, and everybody from Kilner and his glass screens, to Wilhelm Reich with his orgone, claim it's for real. It isn't imagination. Annie Besant said it was like drawing a picture or singing. Everybody can do it, but it takes talent to do it well no matter how hard you work at it.''

''Any of these people report anything about mindreading?''

''Sure, and didn't Peter Hurkos get his talent by falling off a house on his head?'' Neither man knew. But it was clear that Beth, at least, accepted what he said, believed it true. His relief was tangible. Fred said nothing.

''Well. There it is, whatever it is. I don't pretend to understand; god, it scares the piss out of me. But it gave me something that may shake up Ohio River Power where it'll do the most good.''

''Fawcett is embezzling. I don't have details—that's what I need you for, Fred. Is it possible there could be phony invoices, false delivery slips and so on? Would our computer catch something like that?''

''Possible? Hell, some corporations take a certain amount of it for granted. Sure, it can be done. Purchasing kickbacks, the whole rebate scheme, some of it legal, some not—that stuff is all around us. Good paperwork is hard to spot, especially if it has the right hashmarks, entry stamps and all. But it is possible.'' He sat back and slapped his knee. ''Fawcett! I'll be damned. How do you know? Somebody squeal, not getting a big enough slice of the pie?''

''Well, no. I . . . I picked it out of T. J.'s corroded, disgusting old mind. Somebody named Simons is threatening to expose his sex life to his wife and maybe even the company. Damned if I know what difference it would make. He's the one who's scared. The details weren't clear, but dammit, I saw it in his mind! I'm sure Simons is doing it, I just don't know how. Could you tell anything by the accounts?''

''Sure. Let's go down and see.'' Fred rose, and Beth stood also.

''I hope you catch that sleazy old man. He's got a reputation as a lecher that spans three departments and five elevators. If you need me, I'll be at home, reading up on psychic phenomena. Good night. And Cliff, get some rest. You don't look very good.''

''Night,'' said Cliff, ''And, Beth—thanks, huh?''

She turned in the middle of the

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room, looking suddenly vulnerable. "You're welcome. I never really knew a psychic before. Maybe one of these days you'll read *my* mind." Flushing, she fled.

"Well, come on," said Fred Dutton, eager. "Time's wasting, and neither one of us has had any supper."

★

It was there, most of it in PR's expenditures. Though not obvious, it could be detected in comparisons with the previous fiscal year expenditures for the same goods and services. PR was up 287% over last year. Alone in the data processing center in the accounting department, the two studied the display screen, comparing and contrasting. Dutton's audit showed a heavy weighting of expenses for PR materials, services and supplies in favor of one company—Simons-Bertram Communications. Over thirty-six thousand dollars in seven months.

Cliff gave a low whistle. Fred said, "And who can tell how much more, in other expense categories, veiled by complex administrative expense accounting? He pushed away from the console. and tapped the display screen. It showed the vendor record file, and under his finger was the entry:

ACCOUNT
296.01
NAME
Simons-Bertram Comm.
7040 Riverview Ave.
Sparta, OH 43491

CURR. MONTH
$ 4,716.30

YEAR-TO-DATE
$ 36,824.19

Fred punched "replace file" on the keyboard, and then "execute"—the screen went blank.

"Okay. I believe you. I don't care if you read it in the entrails of a shmoo. Tomorrow we dig in, get paperwork together and hang ourselves a senior executive. But tonight we are going to eat steak—on me—and then you are going to rest. You are going to need your strength, and you do not look exactly terrific."

Fred was standing with his hand on the light switch when a fat little man in lime slacks and yellow shirt pushed a cart through the door.

"I'll get that, Mr. Dutton. I thought you'd be through in here."

"Oh, Johnson. What keeps you so late?"

"Sub-routine procedure updates for key-punch. Don't worry, I'll shut off the lights and lock up."

"Okay. Good night." The two men watched the little clerk waddle behind his cart to the input stations. He wore white shoes, and his aura was subdued lavender.

Fred and Cliff went out to dinner. It was over an hour before the lights went out in data processing.

★

The screams woke Cliff in the predawn hours again. Grumbling, he trudged to the bathroom and took a pill.

In bed he tried, in those minutes

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before the pill took effect, to sort out the mechanics of mental eavesdropping. It was obvious that proximity made a difference. *Why?* Was it actual brain wave radiation he was picking up? And another thing: why were there no trivialities, no grocery-list-and-gas-the-car type thoughts. Inconsequential thoughts didn't get through. *Why?* The one constant factor was that every incoming thought had emotional significance. *Why?* What gave these thoughts the power—*power?*

Maybe it worked like radio. Why not? Emotion would be the carrier wave that provided the power of the broadcast; and the thoughts, the pictures and voices, were the modulation that gave the signal pattern. You would have field strength, modulation percentage, and frequency. Are the emotions of human beings different, frequencies? Do they radiate? If so, you'd have standing and delta wave tuning, or something analogous, as well as ground effect (or would it be line-of-sight?), diffusion, refraction, band-width, and whether it would be frequency or amplitude modulated. And what about ambient RF—or should it be *EF*, for empathic frequency as opposed to radio frequency—you would have to filter that out somehow, for just as there are lots of random sources of radio waves creating static all the time, so there are lots and lots of people (and why not other animals?) creating random empathic signals. And no federal agency regulating frequencies and transmitter locations, public service value or signal strength. *Strength.*

It all comes back to power. Assuming that the brain or something could function as a natural or accidental empathic heterodyne, receiving telepathic transmissions the way a filling will with radio, you still haven't established that the emotions create a radiant signal. He thought about the star bodies and wondered for the hundredth time just what those person-sized constellations really were. And wouldn't all those people transmitting all the time create a lot of interference?

That's why it stops when I get upset. He thought. *I'm creating an interfering signal inside myself.* He didn't know and admitted it. Couldn't know, and couldn't prove it if he did—but he could test it as a hypothesis. If it turned out to be true, could you learn to tune in vibrations you wanted, and tune out the undesirable ones? He hoped so. As the sleeping pill began to drag at him, he recalled the old tube-type Philco receiver when he was a kid. It would squeal and howl at times, but the reception and reproduction quality was excellent.

And what did you do when it didn't work? Whomp it a good one! The thought made his head hurt.

★

The telephone woke Cliff with a start.

"Yes?"

"Mr. McBride?" It was Sally in reception. His watch said 9:40.

"Yes?"

"Is Mr. Dutton there with you?" There was fear in her voice.

"No . . . no Fred's not here. What's up?"

"Well, sir. Maybe nothing, but

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when Brenda came with the mail, she asked if I'd found Mr. Dutton yet because sometimes he comes to your office, and she knew Cindy'd told me because she had donuts with her on break and she said she didn't know—''

''Sally.'' Cliff sat up, yawning.

''—whether I'd heard anything yet or if—''

''Miss Horgdorn, please!''

''Sir?''

''Start at the beginning. Is Mr. Dutton not in his office?'' Cliff managed to stand, dragging the phone after him toward the bathroom.

''Oh, no sir. We looked.''

''I should have known.''

''Sir?''

''Sally, just tell me what this is about.''

''Mr. Dutton didn't come in this morning. Nobody thought anything about it, because sometimes—''

''I know. Go on.'' He reached the bathroom and started in with the Norelco.

''Well, Mr. Dutton's secretary asked Mr. Finch's receptionist to call me and ask if he had been here this morning, but the mail girl was coming over here anyway and she said she'd ask me. Well—''

''Miss Horgdorn. Sally. Is Beth —here?''

''Oh, no sir. That's why I called. I wouldn't dream of disturbing you at home, except Beth came out of the office while Brenda was here and said she'd give Mr. Dutton's residence a call and see if he was there and if he knew whether you were coming in, since she didn't want to disturb you if you didn't feel well. She went back in her office and I saw the button light up on the phone and then she just came running out of the office and went right out the door and down the hall! She hasn't come back and I didn't know what to do, so I called you.''

''Of course,'' he said drily, working the shaver into the almost-dimpled point of his chin. ''Did she say anything when she left?''

''No sir. She just went running right past me and out—*Oh, yes!*''

''*What* did she say?''

''No calls.''

''I should have known.''

''Sir?''

''Never mind. Just try Mr. Dutton's home every few minutes. I'll stop by on my way to the office.''

''Yes sir. I'm sorry to disturb you at home like this, Mr. McBride.''

Cliff banged the receiver down with a start and nearly toppled onto the sink. The scream that erupted inside his head was louder than ever. He stared at nothing, beads of sweat forming on face and arms. Why didn't Fred answer his phone if he wasn't in the office? He wanted to get those bogus invoices first thing this morning. He was ashamed to have overslept, himself. And where had Beth gone in such a hurry? He punched Fred's number into the phone.

''I'm sorry, but the number you have reached is not in service. Please be sure you—'' Again Cliff banged the phone on its rest, then lifted it and dialed zero. He was nearly through dressing—brown tie, light brown hounds-tooth—by the time the operator gave up. There

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was something wrong with the number. No tone, no ring, nothing. Open line. "I'm sorry, sir, but that number seems to be out of order. Shall I connect you with—." It was McBride's day for slamming down phones. He tied his shoes and hustled out to his car.

As the motor hummed to life, the scream overwhelmed him again. He lay his head forward on the wheel. As the scream subsided, an image came like a three-dimensional projection. A kitchen, with a wrought-iron dinette in the foreground. *Fred's kitchen! What the–?* A sharp blow struck him on the left cheek. He raised his head and looked around in confusion. The scream followed instantly and seemed in his throat as well as his mind, and he realized that he was experiencing someone else's subjectivity.

He gave a jerk backward against the headrest and his head throbbed. The illusion was gone and he was back in the Buick, sweat burning his eyes and soaking his sportcoat. He wiped his face on his sleeve, found the shift lever and flung the Buick into the traffic of Forty-ninth Street.

It was nearly two miles across town to Fred's house on Birch Court, and as Cliff threaded his way through the station wagons and delivery trucks, the fear crept back into his mind. The slap was so vividly real he was sure his face was red where it struck. An image of Fred's bedroom came into his mind, blending with his actual vision so that it appeared to float above the road ahead.

Cliff tensed, afraid he would smash the car, with the bed and the dresser and the big man with the mustache hovering superimposed on a miniwagon. With his rising fear, the bedroom faded, and his apprehension continued to grow till he rounded the corner into Birch Court and dodged a dark green Chrysler to screech to a halt behind Fred's Datsun.

Heart pounding and head throbbing, Cliff dashed to the door, yelling "Fred!" and trying the doorknob. It was locked. He sprinted around the back. It was locked, too, but he charged with his slotback's shoulder and it sprung open.

There was the wrought-iron dinette and the rest of the kitchen, but no Fred. He called his name and quickstepped to the living room and up the hall to the front bedroom. He burst in and there was Fred in the bed, peaceful and oblivious. *But then, if he's here asleep, why didn't he answer the phone? And where is Beth?* Catching his breath, he tried to think. He suddenly felt foolish. *But, dammit—what about the phone, and what about Beth?*

He lifted the phone from the nightstand. Dead. It wasn't until he put the receiver down again that he saw the note. In a scrawly, uneven parody of the accountant's precise hand, it read:

"I thought no one would find out. I've been a fool. Tell Clifford I couldn't stand for him to know."

Cliff stuffed the note in his pocket and looked at the silent form on the bed. *No aura!* Looking closer he saw the long, slow swell of chest and prayed it wasn't too late. He snatched back the covers

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and turned the terribly limp body over, lifting an eyelid to show only white. He checked the left wrist for pulse, found none, tried the carotid. Faint. Slow. He debated what to do. As he tried to force his mind to analyze, to reach a decision, he spotted the empty prescription bottle in the wastebasket.

Deciding, he ran out the door and through the front, fumbling with the latch, out and across two driveways and pounded on the front door of the next house.

The grayhaired lady with the purple luminescence let him in to use the phone. The fire dispatcher asked him if he knew what kind of pills and how many. He said seconal, but he didn't know how many. The dispatcher told him to get his friend up and moving and try to make him vomit. They would send an ambulance.

Back in the room he got the lifeless Fred out of the bed and tried dragging him around the floor, trying to make him walk. It was no use. Cold sweat made Cliff's hands slippery and he lugged the limp body into the bathroom. Running the water into the tub, he splashed some on the pale face. *Too pale, too still. What if it's too late, and he's dying right here in my arms? Oh god, no, please no.*

Aching with grief and fear, tears streaming down his broad cheeks, small sounds escaping his throat, he held his friend on his knees and hung his head over the tub. Afraid he would choke him in his unconscious state and equally afraid he would never, never puke, Cliff wriggled his index finger down the unresponsive throat again and again. He was still trying when the ambulance arrived.

The squad of three were professional, efficient. One took the slack form from Cliff's arms, another helped lay him down on a stretcher and the third drew Cliff aside and sat him down on the bed, waving a pungent ampoule at him.

"Lie down and put your feet up. Any idea what he took or how many?" Cliff reached the empty bottle from the wastebasket. The hand that accepted it had a greenish dark glow. "Any idea how long ago?" He shook his head and wished he hadn't.

Cliff looked at the stretcher and the other two attendants had Fred's floppy head tipped back, inserting a tube in his mouth. He looked away. The paramedics all had auras, but not Fred Dutton.

"Leave a note?" Cliff considered the question. There was something about the note . . . it didn't look right, and Fred had never called him Clifford. Always Cliff, or McBride. "No," he said, "no note." Was the use of his full first name a clue? If those words were meant to indicate that Fred had been involved in something, like Fawcett's ripoff, then they were bullshit. "No, none."

The attendant was saying something about relaxing a minute when the scream dashed over Cliff's consciousness, rocking him where he sat, blurring his vision and making his head pound. He shut his eyes and a scene of traffic and the green interior of a car came into his vision. It was as though he, terrified, were driving the car. He could see the green hood, the traffic, yes, it

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was route 7 from the look of the buildings. The hands turned the wheel and he knew them. *Beth!*

He watched in shock as her/his vision left the road and glanced at the pistol in the knuckly fist on the lap of the large man with the mustache. He strained to hear as vision returned to the road. They were passing the mall, thick traffic slowing their progress. Fear rose in him, black and chilling.

"Buddy? Hey, buddy! You okay?" The ampoule smell came again. He gasped and opened his eyes on the attendant, who bore him down on the bed and pulled a blanket over him. "Look, you don't look too great. Better rest awhile, and come on down to the hospital when you feel steady, okay?"

"Um . . . which hospital?"

"Sparta United. Just come to Emergency and they'll direct you. Better let your head clear first, though. We gotta take your friend, but I think he'll be all right."

In seconds the three were gone, and Cliff threw back the cover and waited till he saw them drive off before running unsteadily to the Buick.

He urged the Buick down Riverview, parallel to route 7. They were headed north past the mall, so he could stay on Riverview and make up some time. But how far were they going? He didn't know, then suddenly he did. He'd seen it. *The brickyards!* Tension gripped him again, as the memory of a truck roared through his mind. He mashed the accelerator and fought for a clear memory of the cross-streets north of the mall—the nearer the brickyards the better. In less than five minutes he was over the Coal Creek bridge and around a corner onto Seventy-second Street. But traffic clogged up and he had to duck a block farther north, and made the access road that ran behind the tracks and the brickyards in under two minutes.

Suddenly there, he didn't know what to do. He crept toward the intersection of 7 and could see no green Chrysler, or any other car closer than the crowded parking lot way up the road northward, and nothing stirred there. He backed into a gated rear entryway and was pulling out when he saw the car. It was between two freightcars and the tall man was yanking Beth from the drivers' door. They were maybe six hundred feet away. As he watched, the mustached man propelled her forcibly by one arm across the short open space and into the narrow alley between two buildings.

Cliff ran, not daring to think, to the mouth of the alleyway and looked around the corner. He could see nothing but the occasional zip of a vehicle past the narrow end of the alley. He had started up the alleyway when the scream knocked him to his knees with its clenching, blinding ferocity.

Behind closed eyes he saw the mustached man for a second, then felt his arms pinned behind him, clamped in an iron grip.

Wrong mind! Wrong mind, stupid! Pull back. Breathe deep and calm down and pull out of her mind! With an effort and a few deep breaths it began to work. He could feel the sensation of her-ness blur and then slip from him. Then he was above and behind the

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two and could feel the dark brooding mind of the man.

He reached toward the man with his will, seeing his darkling halo and tuning on its umber glow. As he sought for the right level, the right frequency, the glow reddened and brightened with anticipation, then subsided. A car whipped by southbound.

Straining, forcing calm on his tortured nerves, the psychic reached into the hooded horribleness of that twisted mind. No glimmering here, no star of vitality. Just a green-brown knot of seething lust for death. Lust for the blood that would splatter off the grille of the truck and the broken ragdoll flight of the mangled body that would be dead before it landed.

The hungering, slavering evil aroused disgust and revulsion so elemental in Cliff that he nearly lost the contact with the killer's mind. "!!!" went the mind in a quickening of anticipation. A truck's low rumble began in the distance.

No screamed Cliff's mind as the sound grew. A hatred rose and threatened his tuning on the sick man's mind. In desperation, he pushed the hatred and the fear and the revulsion away from himself, pushed it toward the truck, piled it on the red and white tractor and away from the mind he needed. He thrust and shoved his swelling, loathing rage at the truck with all his emotional might, holding the sniggering deathlust in focus. When the eyes of the man fed him the sight of the truck, small but rapidly growing in the distance, Cliff seized the vision. Frantically he called to his own emotive power, now vested in the barreling, rocking diesel, pulling it toward him, elongating and stretching the *image* of the truck, nearer and nearer.

With an emphatic ejaculation of pent-up tension, the man jerked the woman upright and, timing carefully, propelled her into the path of the truck.

Cliff recognized her paralyzing scream of terror and his soul ached.

Incredibly, the image of the truck in the man's mind passed through her, and she took a stumbling step and began to run with all her might.

In a reflex as ancient as lizards and insects, as cats and mice, the burly, mustached man scrambled after her. The truck driver later swore in testimony he had seen the lady run across the road, but not the man whose heavy body stove in his Kenworth emblem and flew eighty-three feet.

★

They sat on Fred's hospital bed and told it all, Beth leaning back into Cliff's embrace and turning for the occasional kiss. Fred's aura was bright as ever and his lean brow knit in the recounting of Beth's interruption of his inquisition.

Beth, hugging Cliff's arms round her body, told of the drive to the brickyards and the hysterical fear, and the amazing escape, but could not retell the horrible death of the man Bertram.

Cliff tried to explain his psychic experience, but Fred didn't seem to understand. Beth was understanding and interested, using words like *prana* and *chakram* and *astral*. But she didn't understand either, as his

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probing of her mind revealed. The probing revealed other things, too: years of affection and growing devotion through the divorce and finally a helpless, longing love, so disturbing she had shielded all her feelings carefully, even from herself.

And they filled Fred in on the embezzlement. Fawcett was in custody, as were two of the three others—a junkie from the receiving dock named Bender, and the records clerk Dalby Johnson, a compulsive pederast on whom Simons had an extensive file. He had confessed, blubbering.

Simons himself was gone. In a rundown storefront at 7040 Riverview police found a printing press and layout table and twenty different styles of paper and envelopes, none of them printed. Printed samples they had from the files at Ohio River Power, plus they had Johnson's confession. But not Simons. They had a good description of him, and the evidence to convict him of fraud, but that was all they had.

When the Saturday sun was long gone, Cliff stood and stretched, watching the dance of lights in Beth's aura. Feeling his gaze and taking his hint, she stood too, and gave him a long hug. He dragged his mind from her hungry thoughts and said goodnight to his friend.

"We'd better let you get some rest, Freddie. This has been a lot of excitement, and they tell me you're still a little weak."

"Oh, I'll be back on the old solid-state treadmill Monday." But Cliff could tell he was weary. He took Beth's hand and it was warm, with a soft orange glow. Fred slipped down in the bed and gave a tired little wave.

Together, they left the room.

—PETER MARTIN

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AN END TO CRIME

by Ed Ludwig

It's something everybody wants . . . don't they?

IT WAS A SMALL saucer-shaped valley in California's wine country, lined with neat green rows of grape vines and basking in warm afternoon sunlight on this 12th day of September. In its center were a bright buff-colored farmhouse and a winery and barn.

Beneath the sign reading CELESTIAL SWISS VINEYARDS, Jeff Reed wiped perspiration from his forehead and gray stubble and paused at the side of the road. "Whew," he said aloud in, at once, relief, exhaustion and anticipation. He looked down.

The vineyard was quiet. In the distance a tractor moved, driven by a bearded man and spurting forth trails of dust. Someone, a woman, moved through the front yard of the house.

A quiet house. Lonely. Inside, food, fresh clothing, money, wine. What a contrast to the cold streets of San Francisco, the smog of Los Angeles. And Jeff, he told himself, was an honest thief. He took only what he really needed. He really did not steal.

He was sober after that week-long romp on the Embarcadero. His mind was reasonably clear; his hands steadier than they'd been for months.

"Yep, you did right coming here," he murmured, "—away from twenty years in bars and Good Will handouts and Salvation Army lectures. And don't forget—they was talkin' about a war in Frisco. Bombs and gas and all that."

He scuffled down from the

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highway. Through a side of his vision flashed the figure of a boy leading a small brown horse throughout the yard.

It might be well to enter the winery first, he thought. The building was old, huge and partially concealed by oak trees.

He found access: a small ground-level window in solid stone wall. Sweating, he inserted a stick in a corner of the window frame, pried it outward. The grating made him wince. It wasn't much of a window. It must be only for ventilation.

He slipped in. Black coolness soothed him. Damn! It was dark in here. He lit a match and saw walls that must be two feet thick. And barrels of wine and hundreds of rows of bottles. Expensive wine—not rot-gut!

But this was no time to think of wine. The world was still razor-sharp real, and there could be a war. He must get to the farmhouse, find clean clothes and *money.*

The match flicked out. He lit another. His hand began to shake. His shoulders twitched. He blinked furiously.

Maybe a drink would help. Just one to warm his insides. He'd be able to work better, he knew.

He used the little bottle-opener attachment of his pocket knife and managed to open a bottle.

He drank.

It became warm. He remembered hot days in Florida, a blonde from—where? And that park in San Jose, by the Post Office.

He lit more matches, uncorked another bottle of wine. The ground shook. Far away there was a great rumbling, a deep thunder.

The shelved bottles shook. Some cracked and splattered to the stone floor. "Hey!" he said. *"I* didn't do that. I'm not that drunk."

He drank.

★

He awoke, eyes hot and tired, head throbbing. He still had matches and he found his way to a light switch and a flight of stairs.

Abruptly he was outside. Sunlight stung his eyes. A realization came to his clouded senses. It was *quiet.* It was like floating on the bottom of a sea. There were only the soundless caress of a breeze, the movement of a trembling leaf.

Then, a whinny. In the front-yard of the farmhouse lay the little horse he'd glimpsed yesterday. Its dark brown eyes were wild, its legs spread-eagled, its tail thrashing, all as if in a futile struggle to rise. Rivulets of blood trickled from its nostrils.

"Little girl, what happened? God, what happened?"

Jeff saw, in the distance, the tractor motionless in the fields, its bearded driver slumped over the wheel. He moved to the house, found the woman on the porch. Inside, a man and a small boy. All very white and very dead.

"God, I need a drink."

No, the TV first. Jeff flicked on the knob. The tube burst into light; there was no picture, no

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sound.

He remembered. The war. And yet no bombs, no real explosions?

He stumbled outside to a Ford pickup. He turned on the car radio. Static, finally a voice, cracked and far-away:

"... only people and living creatures ... neutron bombs ... West Coast, East, South- ... structures still intact ... Idaho and South Dakota sending help ... end to hostility ..."

He remembered. This was really why he'd left Frisco.

"Well, Jeffy-boy,"—His mother had called him that—"what do you do now?"

He took a deep breath and answered himself. "You go on. Nothing, for you, has changed. You've been alone for twenty years. You take the pickup, food, money. You go to where people are, to Idaho."

Then the horse whinnied.

She was still thrashing and struggling. She was caked in her own excrement.

"Damn, I always hated horses."

He thought for a long moment. "Okay, I'll help you before I go."

He found a bucket, filled it with water. The horse drank. He located hay in the barn and fed her. He tried to clean the dirty portions of her body. Her eyes were no longer wild.

"Strange you made it," he told her. "Nobody except you and me. With me it must have been the wine cellar, with you, 'cause you're strong."

It wasn't easy going back inside the House of the Dead. But, he told himself, there would be many more Houses of Death.

It was a beautiful home: clean carpets, shiny bright walls, soft chairs, a stereo, TV, a bicycle. He felt no sense of loss, for it seemed a place where the Other People lived.

He found money and jewelry neatly stacked in a bureau drawer and a small wall safe. The challenge of the safe held no fascination. And the thrill of seeing the money and jewelry no longer existed. To hell with them.

He did find canned food—stew and vegetables—which he believed was still good. A rifle, an automatic .22, could be of use, although he'd always hated guns. He filled all empty canteens and jugs with water, for no matter where he was, he would still have to drink.

Drink?

Before starting his trip he'd better take a few bottles of wine, maybe a cask. Idaho was many miles away.

In the wine cellar he found a hammer and chisel and a dozen empty bottles. The wine flowed easily and like cold blood. His hands began to shake. He sipped. The last time, he thought, the last time before Idaho.

★

The next day the horse whinnied. Jeff blinked in bright sunlight which was blotted away every second or two by wisps of dark clouds.

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The horse remained sprawled, and Jeff brought her fresh water. She seemed to be trying to rise.

But what if she never rose again? A cloud scudded across the sky. What if winter rains beat down upon the land, the farm, the horse?

As Jeff thought, he found eggs inside the house, fried three and began to eat. Maybe he should build a shelter for the horse before he left. Maybe, if he waited, he could help the horse into the barn.

The eggs gagged him. In the next room and on the porch and in the tractor, were the farm people. He couldn't take their food, their pickup, their wine while they lay in open air.

He worked until the sky was dark—both with clouds and approaching night. But the farm people were buried.

It was time for a drink.

★

The next day he started work on the shelter. The sky was overcast. Fresh corn was in the little garden behind the house, and it must be picked.

He watered the horse and curried her, and her brown eyes seemed to sparkle. Her legs moved more easily.

Jeff muttered, "I think you're *smiling* at me. I think you might start to walk again pretty soon."

He was suddenly tired. "I got to go, Brown Eyes. Sorry. It's a big world, and there are still people out there. I got to try to find 'em."

He turned away.

Brown Eyes whinnied.

Angrily, Jeff turned back scowling. "Damn you, I can't spend my life with a crippled horse and a wine cellar. I got to get movin' on."

But first there was another cask of wine, and a watering of the horse, and a day passed, and two and three, and then a week.

And it was a great many years before he moved on.

—Ed Ludwig

★ ★ ★

EDITORIAL *(con't. from pg. 5)*

heat throughout the week of the convention.

The point isn't whether Mr. Ellison is right or wrong, the point isn't whether we agree with him or not, as far as I personally am concerned the point is: how many of Harlan's detractors have ever in their life endured one-half as much for a cause they believed in as Harlan was willing to endure for one he believed in?

If there is anything history demonstrates and science fiction has been trying to teach us, it's that social forms are constantly changing, no matter how much it might disturb those who don't wish such change (and that applies as equally to pro-ERA supporters as its antagonists). **—Hank Stine**

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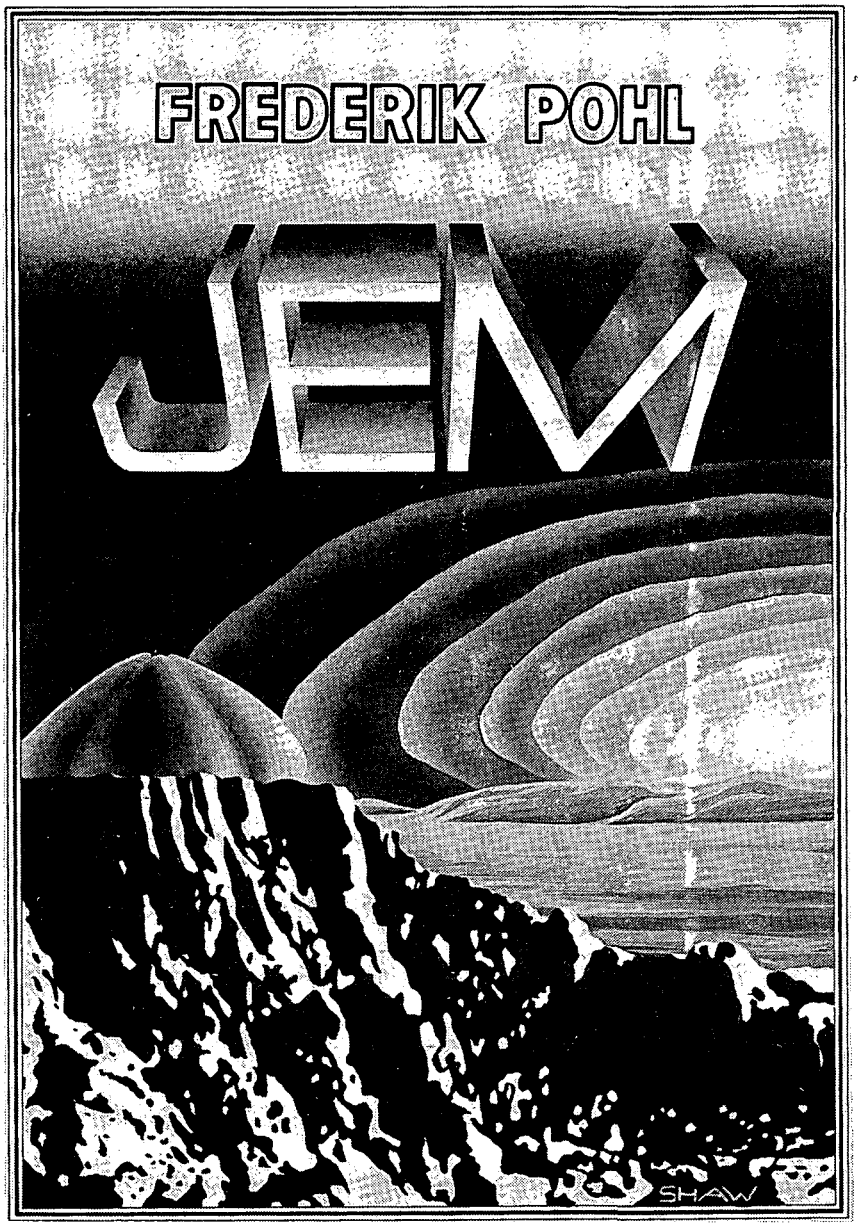

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Things were hotting up on Jem—everybody wanted a piece of the pie . . . and there wasn't enough pie to go around!

JEM
Synopsis

At the Tenth General Assembly of the World Conference on Exobiology in Sofia, Bulgaria, DANNY DALEHOUSE hears for the first time of the semi-stellar object N-OA Bes-Bes Geminorum 8426—sometimes called Kung's Star—or Klong . . . or JEM. Jem is inhabited! Not with just one intelligent species, but three: a race of sentient hydrogen-filled balloons, weasel-like burrowers and hardshelled arthropods. They are the first sentient life discovered anywhere in the universe off Earth—and three of them.

The race to explore Jem is on. All three of the great power blocs of terrestrial nations prepare expeditions: the Food countries, like the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union; the oil-rich Fuel bloc of Venezuela, England and the Arab states; the People's Republics, headed by China.

In Sofia Dalehouse has met and had a brief affair with CAPTAIN MARJORIE MENNINGER, a young American Army officer with shadowy family connections into the mysterious high levels of government and intelligence. The two of them get into a scrape with the police and are rescued by ANA DIMITROVA, a translator for the Conference. Ana is Bulgarian, and therefore also a member of the Food Bloc, but she is in love with AHMED DULLA, the Pakistani who presented the report on Jem, who is a Peep. Marge Menninger promises to see that a Food Bloc expedition will go to Jem, and that Dalehouse will be on it. She keeps her promise, but the Peeps are quicker. Dulla's expedition is the first to land.

Arriving first is not all advantageous, however. Jem is full of perils. The chemistry of its biota is hostile to Terrestrial life, and most of the Peeps become quick casualties with severe allergic reactions. Some die. Dulla attempts to establish contact with Krinpit, the armored, crab-like creatures. The allergic process works both ways. Dulla becomes ill and helpless in the Krinpit village, and so do many of the Krinpit. Some of them die, including the male of the Krinpit name Sharn-igon.

When Dalehouse's expedition arrives on Jem, its leaders have learned some lessons from the disasters that befell the Peeps. But the planet still has surprises. Dalehouse and his friend, the Russian pilot KAPPELYUSHNIKOV, attempt to establish contact with the airborne race of balloonists. They

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have some success, and decide to build balloons of their own to join them in the sky. They even observe the balloonists spawning over their camp. Scientifically, this is a triumph. But as they breed, the balloonists secrete a spray which is both hallucinogenic and aphrodisiac. It is the finest high on two worlds—and the whole Food Camp trips out. It isn't a catastrophe—they survive it, if a little bedraggled—but it complicates relationships with the balloonists. Nevertheless, Dalehouse gets his balloon working and joins the airborne race in the sky. He meets the balloonist he names "CHARLIE"—an immense, hydrogen-fijlled sac bearing a tiny, insect-like body, but with a language, a social position as the leader of his flock and a capacity for friendship.

The Fuel Bloc—the "Greasies"—have finally landed their expedition on Jem, and typically have all sorts of power machinery, even aircraft. Dalehouse goes with a helicopter pilot from the Greasies, BOYNE, to rescue Dulla and return him to his own base; at the same time, they transport the Krinpit, Sharn-igon, to the Greasy camp for study. But Sharn-igon is not willing to be studied. He kills his human guards and escapes to a nearby Krinpit village, rousing them to fight against the poisonous creatures from Earth.

Meanwhile, on Earth the uneasy truce among the great power blocs is being stressed by quarrels over Jem. Marge Menninger gets the U.S.S.U. Food Bloc expedition reinforced through her father, GODFREY MENNINGER, the shadowy head of American Intelligence. But the cost is immense—in money, in fuel, in raw materials and in political complications. Marge starts a program of developing "trade goods" for the Jemman creatures. Most of the products are weapons. On the other side of the fence, God Menninger's opposite number in the Greasy bloc, SIR TAM GULSMIT, throws obstacles in their way; and Marge Menninger decides to take more direct action. She bribes a defector from the Peoples' Republics space program to plant a bomb to delay their reinforcement of their Jemman colony. It succeeds better than she had planned. Their tachyon-transmission satellite is destroyed, and all their crews in transit are killed.

XII

What Ana Dimitrova had seen of the United States was what she had seen of most of the world: airports, hotel rooms, meeting halls, city streets. So at first she looked around with lively interest as the electrobus whined along an eight-lane superhighway toward the place she had been ordered to report to. So much open space, not even farmed! And contrarily, so many places lined up one after another as they passed through communities, places to eat, places to sleep, places to drink, places to buy gas; what prodigious devourers these Americans must be, to keep them all flourishing!

She touched the tiny microfiche from Ahmed, at the bottom of her blouse pocket. She had no reader for it, but she needed none. As al-

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ways it was formal, not very rewarding and extremely short:

My dear Ana,

I appreciate the letters you have been sending and think of you often.

With great affection,

Dulla

He could have spent a few P$ more, she thought resentfully, and then, as always, brought herself up sharply. Ahmed was from a poor country. Even fiched and faxed, the cost per square centimeter of a letter from Kungson to Earth was very high. (But in her own letters she had poured money out like water. (But she could not judge him; she had not had the life experience of measuring every penny. (But it was not just the economy of space and money—how much more he could have said, if he had chosen, in even fewer words!—it was the economy of emotion that she begrudged.))) Three deep in parentheses, she took her mind off Dulla and resolved to think about more profitable subjects, and then realized the bus had stopped.

Three uniformed Americans had entered by the driver's seat. One of them gestured for silence and said, to the bus at large, "You people are welcome, and let's see some I.D."

Craning her neck, Nan could see a barricade with two other soldiers standing by it. They were not at attention, but they were watching the bus quite carefully, and she observed that what had looked like a well-clipped hedge stretching away on both sides of the barrier had barbed wire inside it. How curious. They were treating this place as though it were some sort of military installation, rather than a center for preparing scientists and support personnel for a peaceful expedition to Kungson. Big-power customs were so strange to her. When the MPs came to her she handed her passport over, and smiled at the tall black one who was studying it. He returned her look impassively. "Name?"

Of course, it was right there, next to his thumb. "Ana Elena Dimitrova."

"Place of birth?"

"My place of birth? It is Marek, Bulgaria. That is a city south of Sofia, not far from the Yugoslavian border."

"Put your thumb here, please." She pressed against the little pad he extended to her and then on a square white card, which he tucked into her passport. "Your papers will be returned to you later," he said, and then unbent. "You like to dance? There's a nice group at the club tonight? Ask for me if you don't see me. Name's Leroy."

"Thank you, Leroy."

"See you later, honey." He winked and moved along. Ana found a tissue and wiped the ink off her thumb wonderingly. These Americans were worse even than Sir Tam—not just the Americans, she corrected herself, thinking of the Vietnamese colonel and his agile tiny hands. Would it be like this always? Would it not be even worse, when she was part of the small colony on Kungson and they were all living in each other's pockets anyway?

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But at least then Ahmed would be somewhere near! In the wrong encampment, yes. But she would find a way to see him. Let her get just on the same planet with him again, and they would be together! It made the whole ordeal seem worthwhile.

★

By the next day, not even that made it seem altogether attractive. She could not have attended Leroy's dance that night if she wanted to. There was no time. Issue of new clothing: "You will wear these here fatigues at all times, except when instructed by your instructors." Assignment to quarters: "You will maintain cleanliness at all times. At all times all personal possessions are to be kept in your footlockers." Preliminary briefing: "You will fall out at oh six hundred hours for breakfast. From oh seven hundred to eleven hundred you will participate in your individual refresher courses of instruction in the application of your specialized skills on Klong. From twelve hundred to sixteen thirty you will complete your survival course to teach you your survival skills for surviving in the environment of Klong. From eighteen hundred to lights out at twenty-two hundred you will conduct your personal affairs except when required to participate in additional refresher courses or survival instruction. Weekends? Who's the guy who wants to know about weekends? Oh, you. Well, there aren't any weekends here." By the time all that was finished it was nearly midnight, and then Ana dragged her suitcase to the tiny, bare room that had been assigned to her, coldly furnished, like the showcase cell in a county jail, to find out that her roommate was the Vietnamese colonel. Even here rank had its privilege. But Ana was having none of it, and so it was back to the billeting office and a good deal of argument, and by the time she was able to get to sleep in a new room with a female roommate it was nearly two.

Breakfast was discouragingly huge, eggs and sausage and cereal and breads with jams and marmalades and peanut butter in opened liter cans on every table, and for dessert they spent an hour receiving inoculations. None of them were painful, but from the grins and jokes of the medics Ana knew that they would be later on. And then she lined up with the other two dozen of her detachment in a wet, cold wind, and they were marched off to their various refresher courses of instruction in the application of thier specialized skills. Ana's tiny group included the Canadian woman and two men unknown to her, and they wound through the camp streets, past a baseball field and a bowling alley, between barracks and anonymous buildings with armed guards patrolling before them, out into an open field half a kilometer square. In the center of it was a sort of tethered balloon shaped like a sausage, fifty meters long, with guards around the perimeter and three of them grouped before the entrance. There was a fence surrounding the whole thing, and more guards at the gate in the fence; and before any of them were permitted

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inside they had to go through the same tedious business of checking I.D.'s one more time.

Off to one side there was a tall chimney, coupled to the main tent by a flexible plastic tube. The chimney roared. Though there was no smoke, the shimmering at the top of it showed some very hot gases boiling high into the air out of it. It did not seem to serve any function that Ana could guess. But then neither did the weapons that all the permanent party personnel carried. Who were they meant to be used against? What possible enemy threatened a training base for a scientific expedition which, after all, was in a sense the property of the entire world?

When she finally got through the gates and the guards she found herself in a long open shed, covered with the opaque white plastic of the bubble. The atmosphere was damp and heavy, filled with strange smells, and the lighting was sultry-red. At first she could see very little, but she was aware that people were moving about between rows of what seemed to be smaller, transparent bubbles. The lighting came from a bank of gas-glow tubes, all red, and there was not very much of it.

And then she saw the balloonist.

She recognized it at once; there could not be another creature as strange as that anywhere in the universe! But it looked—damaged. It was tethered inside a cage. Its great bubble was throbbing but almost limp, sagging against the ground. She stared, fascinated, and saw that a flexible plastic coupling had been taped neatly to a hole in the gasbag, and the plastic line went to a cylinder of gas. A woman with a tape recorder was crouched by the cylinder, adjusting the gas valve as she listened to the balloonist's plaintive song.

No wonder the voice sounded so faint! He was operating at a fraction of normal pressure, far too little to let him fly, only enough to let him gasp a sobbing sort of song. The woman looked up and said, "You're Dimitrova? I'm Julia Arden, and this—" pointing at the balloonist—"is Shirley. She's singing about her childhood right now."

Ana shook hands courteously, staring at the sad, wrinkled little creature. Those sounds did not seem like language! She could not imagine understanding them, much less translating them, no matter how many times they halved her brain! She said doubtfully, "I will do my best, Mis Arden, but do you think you really can teach me to talk to that?"

"Me? Maybe not. I'll help, and so will the computers, but the one who's going to teach you is Shirley herself. She loves to sing to us. Poor thing. She doesn't have much else to do with her time, does she?"

Nan looked at the creature for a moment and then burst out, "No, but what a shame, really! Can you not see she is in pain?"

The other woman shrugged. "What do you want me to do about it?" Her tone was less hostile than defensive. "I don't suppose Shirley vounteered for this duty, but then neither did I. Your job is learning her language, Dimitrova, and let's get on with it."

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"But to see a creature in pain—" Julia Arden laughed, and then shook her head. "Sweetie, you only got here last night. Wait a day or two. Then you can talk to me about pain."

★

From 0700 to 1100 Ana Dimitrova stretched the muscles of her mind until she thought she would die of it, and from 1200 to 1630 she balanced the diet by doing the same to her body. Julia Arden had been right. Within forty-eight hours Ana was an expert on pain. She woke up each morning with a hazy overcast of brightness that she knew was the foretaste of migraine. She went to bed each night with so many aches, throbs, and bruises that it took all the will she had to refrain from swallowing the pills they had given her. She could not afford pills; she needed her mind alert. Even while she slept, because sleeping was only another kind of study for Ana, with the taped calls of the balloonists murmuring under her pillow all night long.

The headaches, all right, they were something she was used to. Worse than that, the shots were producing their effect. Her skin was covered with little blisters and bumps, some that itched, some that were tender, some downright painful every moment of time. Not just pain. She wheezed and coughed. Her eyes ran uninterruptedly, and so did her nose. She was not alone; everyone in her group was having the same reaction to the allergy shots. If this was the prophylaxis, what could the illness itself be like? And then she saw the holos of the unfortunate Peeps who had died of their reactions, before the countermeasures had been developed, and they defined for her the difference between prophylaxis and reality. It was not comforting to her. It was terrifying. How had Ahmed fared in all this? He had said nothing in his letters, but perhaps he was only being brave.

And every afternoon, feel well, feel ill, no matter, there she was out on the exercise field. Pushups and five hundred meter runs, obstacle courses and rope climbing. Her hands were raw, then blistered, then calloused. Even through the coveralls her knees were scraped bloody. Everywhere on arms and legs where there was not a pimple or blister there was a bruise.

To be sure, she scolded herself, for all of this there was a clear purpose! Kungson was no picnic dell, it was a place of strange and perhaps lethal dangers. These measures, however brutal, were only to help her meet those dangers and conquer them. If she had not volunteered for the job, she had also not refused it when offered.

And, finally, the most potent argument of all. It was the way to Ahmed. So she did her best, all the time, and was secretly proud of the fact that some of the others were doing less well than she. The tiny Vietnamese colonel, Nguyen Dao Tree, fell in a heap from the knotted ropes one afternoon and was taken to hospital. (But he was back the next day, limping but game.) One woman, an older one, perhaps almost forty, fell flat on her face halfway up a rocky hill; she was

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taken away too, and she did not return.

As days became weeks the fatigue lessened, the bruises healed, the reactions to the antiallergens diminished. The headaches stayed the same, but Ana was used to them, and she learned to take part in the friendly chatter in the messhall. Always there were such stories! They were going to Kungson on a one-way trip and were expected to breed there and raise a new race of humans. They were not going to Kungson at all, but to a new planet, not yet announced or even named. They were not going into space at all. They were going to be parachuted onto the Scottish coast to commandeer the oil refineries. They were going to Antarctica, which was going to become a new Food Bloc colony since a process had been discovered for melting the ice cap. At first Ana was frightened by such stories. Then amused, then bored; she began making up stories of her own, and found them as quickly passed along as any other. But some of the stories seemed true. Even some terrible ones: an unexplained accident in space that had destroyed the Peeps' resupply ships and even their tachyon-transit satellite itself. She let herself be late for dinner that night, to listen to the evening news; sure enough, it was official. How terrifying! What would it mean to Ahmed? But then the news went on to say that the expeditions of the Fuel and Food Blocs had offered help to the expedition of the Peoples' Republics, and, with her heart full, Ana hurried to the dining room, demanded attention and proposed thay they all sign a letter of sympathy and good wishes to their colleagues of the Peoples' Bloc. The faces all turned to her, then whispered among themselves, half embarrassed, but in the long run they let her write the letter and they all signed. The next afternoon her training supervisor even excused her early to carry the document to the office of the camp commandant. He listened to her blankly, read the document three times and then promised to send it through channels. At dinner that night she reported glowingly what had happened, but her news was drowned in other news. There were three new stories. First, that they were to receive a large shipment of new trainees the next day. Second, that a date had been set for their flight to Kungson, less than three weeks in the future. And third, contradictorily, that the whole project was about to be canceled.

Such stories! Ana stood up angrily, rapping her fork against her thick chinaware cup. "How can you all believe this nonsense?" she demanded. "How can all of these be true at once?" But not many of the others were paying attention, and she felt a tug at her elbow.

It was the colonel, who had, as he often did, squeezed in between Ana and her roommate at the table in order to try his fortunes one more time. "Sweet, beautiful Ana," he said, "don't make a fool of yourself. I know something of these stories, and they are all true."

★

That one of them was true was proved the next morning. Sixty-five

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more persons arrived at the base, and Ana knew one of them! It was the blonde woman who was Godfrey Menninger's daughter.

Of course, everything was turned topsy-turvy. All of the billeting accomodations were changed to make room for the new arrivals—no, not for that reason alone, Ana realized, because most of the new ones, and quite a few of the old ones, were housed in another barracks half a kilometer away. Ana lost her WAC corporal roommate, and feared at once she would get Colonel Nguyen back again. But that did not happen. He went to the other barracks, and Ana was moved in with the Canadian woman whose specialty seemed to be growing food crops in unusual circumstances. Marge Menninger caught sight of Ana in the crowd and waved to her. But they had no chance to speak—not that Ana had any particular reason to want to speak to the American, anyway—and, in all the confusion, she was nearly an hour late arriving at her morning session with the female balloonist.

The creature was no longer a specimen to Ana. She was a friend. Into the cognitive half of Ana's brain the songs of the balloonists had poured. In the first day she had learned to understand a few simple phrases, in a week to communicate abstract thoughts; now she was almost fluent. Ana had never thought of herself as having any kind of a singing voice, but the balloonist was not critical. They sang to each other for hours on end, and more and more Shirley's songs were sad, and despairing, and sometimes even disconnected. She was, she told Ana, the last survivor of the dozen or more of the species who had been wrenched from Kungson and hurled to this inhospitable place. She did not expect to live much longer. She sang to Ana of the sweetness of warm pollen in a damp cloud, of the hot singing sadness of egg-spraying, of the communal joy of the flock in chorus. She told Ana that she would never sing in the flock again. She was thrice right. She would not have dared sing, with her voice so pitifully harsh and weak, as the gas-pump gave her only faltering tones. She had no chance of being returned to Kungson. And she knew death was near; and two days later she was dead. Ana arrived at the zoo to find her cage empty, and Julia Arden supervising the sterilization of its parts. "Don't take on," she advised gruffly. "You've learned all you need to know."

"It is not for the learning that I weep. It is because I have lost someone dear."

"Christ. Get out of here, Dimitrova. How did they let a jerk like you into this project in the first place? Crying over a dead fartbag and sending love-letters to the Peeps—you're really out of it!"

Ana marched back to the barracks, threw herself down on her cot and allowed herself to weep as she had not done in months—for Shirley, for Ahmed, for the world and for herself. "Out of it," described her feelings exactly. How had everything become so hideous and complex?

That afternoon in the exercise field was an ordeal. The physical strain was no longer a real problem,

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but for some days now the "exercises" had taken a new turn. All of them, her own original detachment as well as the new arrivals, had been working less to strengthen their muscles and reflexes than to learn to handle unfamiliar equipment—unfamiliar to Ana, at least; she observed that all of the new people, and some of the old, had obviously had experience with it already. Such equipment! Heavy hoses like water-cannon, backpacked tanks and nozzles like flame-throwers, lasers, even grenade-launchers. For what grotesque purpose was all this intended? Tight-lippped, Ana did as she was told. Repeatedly she found herself in difficulties and had to be bailed out by one of the others. The colonel saved her from incinerating herself with a flame-thrower, and Sergeant Sweggert had to rescue her when the recoil of her water-cannon knocked her off her feet. "Please do not concern yourself," she gasped furiously, pulling herself erect and reaching once more for the hose. "I am quite all right."

"Hell you are," he said amiably. "Lean into it more, honey, you hear? It doesn't take muscle, just a little brains."

"I do not agree."

He shook his head. "Why do you get so uptight, Annie?"

"I do not like being trained in the use of weapons!"

"What weapons?" He grinned at her. "Don't you know this stuff is only to use against vermin? Colonel Menninger spelled it all out for us. We don't want to kill any sentients, that's against the law, and besides we'll all get our asses in a crack. But all the intelligent ones got little like cousins, crab-rats and air-sharks and things that dig around in the dirt and come out and chew your ass off. *Those* are what we're going to use this stuff for."

"In any event," said Ana, "I do not require assistance from you, Sergeant. Even if I believed you, or your Colonel Menninger, which I do not."

Sweggert looked past her and pursed his lips. "Hello, there, Colonel," he said. "We was just talking about you."

"So I noticed," said Margie Menninger's voice. Ana turned slowly, and there she was. Looking, Ana observed without regret, quite poorly. The shots were having their way with her, and her face was broken out in cerise blotches, her eyes were red and running and her hair had dark roots. "Get on with it, Sergeant," she said. "Dimitrova, see me in my room after chow."

She turned away, and raised her voice. "All right, all of you," she cried. "Get your asses down! Let's see how you crawl!"

Rebelliously Ana dropped to the ground and practiced the way of worming herself across an open field that she had learned the day before. These were infantry tactics! What nonsense, for a scientific expedition! She conserved her anger carefully, and it lasted her the rest of the afternoon, through dinner and right up to the moment she knocked on Menninger's door in that other barracks halfway across the base.

"Come in." Lt. Col. Menninger was sitting at a desk in a white, fluffy dressing gown, rimless

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granny-glasses on her nose, a half-eaten dinner tray pushed to one side. She looked up from some papers and said, "Take a seat, Ana. Do you smoke? Would you like a drink?"

The angry fires inside 'Ana banked themselves. But they were still ready to blaze out. "No, thank you," she said, in general, to all.

Margie stood up and poured herself a scant shot of whiskey. She would have preferred marijuana, but she did not care to share a joint with this Bulgarian. She sipped a centimeter off the top of the drink and said, "Personal question. What have you got against Sweggert?"

"I have nothing against Sergeant Sweggert. I simply do not care to make love with him."

"What are you, Dimitrova, some maximum women's-libber? You don't have to ball him on the parade ground. Just let him give you a hand when he wants to."

"Colonel Menninger," Ana said precisely, "are you ordering me to encourage his sexual overtures so that I can complete the obstacle course more readily?"

"I am not ordering you to do diddly-shit, Dimitrova. What is it with you? Sweggert comes on to everything with a hole in it. It's his nature. He comes on to me, too. I could put the son of a bitch in Leavenworth for the places his hands have been on the drill field. But I won't, because he's a good sol—because he's essentially a good person. He'll help you if you let him. You can always tell him to fuck off later on."

"This I consider immoral, Colonel Menninger."

Margie finished her drink and poured half of another. "You're not too happy here, are you, Ana?"

"That is correct, Mis Menninger. I did not ask for this assignment."

"I did."

"Yes, no doubt, perhaps you did, but I—"

"No, that's not what I mean. I asked for it for myself, but I also asked for you, too. I picked you out by name, Ana, and it took hell's own convincing to make the Bulgarians turn you loose. They think you're pretty great at translating." She tossed down the rest of the drink and took off her glasses. "Look, Ana, I need you. This project is important to me. It should be important to you, too, if you have a spark of patriotism in your body."

"*Patriotism*?"

"Loyalty, then," said Margie impatiently. "Loyalty to our bloc. I know we come from different countries, but we stand for the same thing."

Ana found herself more puzzled than angry by this strange American. She tried to sort her feelings out and express them exactly. "Bulgaria is my home," she began. "I love my home. The Food Bloc—that is a much more abstract thing, Mis Menninger. I understand that in a world of two hundred nations there must be alliances, and that one owes one's allies some sort of allegiance. Or at least courtesy. But I cannot say I feel loyalty. Not to the Food Bloc."

"To the whole human race then, honey," said Margie. "Don't you see it? You just said it for yourself, a world of two hundred nations. But Klong can be a world of *one* nation!

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No fighting. No spies. No cloak-and-dagger shit. Who colonized America?''

''What?'' It took Ana a moment to realize she was supposed to answer the question. ''Why—the English? Before them, the Dutch.''

''And before them maybe the Italians, with Columbus, and maybe, for Christ's sake, anybody you like—the Vikings, the Polynesians, the Chinese. Who knows? But the people who live in America now are the *Americans*. And that's who's going to living on Klong in another generation or two. The Klongans. Or whatever they call themselves. A single race of human beings. Never mind where they come from here! They'll be all the same, all part of the same wonderful—well, dream. I don't mind calling it a dream. But you and I can make it come true, Ana. We can learn how to live on Klong. We can build a world without national barriers, and without the kind of senseless competition and rapacity that has ruined this one. Do you know what it means to have a whole new world to start over on?''

Ana was silent. ''I—I have had some thoughts of that sort myself,'' she admitted.

''Of course you have. *And I want to make it happen*. I want to lay the foundations for a world society that understands planning and conversation and cooperation. Do you know how much we're putting into this? *Four ships*. Nearly ninety people. Thirty-five tons of equipment. The invasion of Europe cost less than this one launch, and, believe me, everybody involved is screaming. It costs too much. It upsets the Peeps. The Greasies will raise their prices. We need the resources to solve the problems of the cities. Half the Congress would like to call if off tomorrow—''

''One has heard rumors,'' Ana said cautiously, ''that the launch may be canceled.''

Margie hesitated and a shadow crossed her face. ''No,'' she corrected. ''that will not happen, because it is too important. But that is why I asked for you, Ana. If we can send ninety people, they must be the best ninety people there are. And you are the best translator I could find.'' She reached out and touched Ana's sleeve. ''Do you understand?''

Ana drew away as soon as she could without giving offense, her thoughts uncertain. ''Y-yes,'' she said unwillingly, and then: ''But, on the other hand, no. What you say is most persuasive, Mis Menninger, but what has it to do with the use of flame-throwers and other weapons? Are we to build this fine monolithic world by destroying everyone else?''

''Of course not, Ana!'' cried Margie, with as much shock and revulsion in her voice as she knew how to put there. ''I give you my word!''

There was silence. ''I see,'' said Ana at last. ''You give me your word.''

''What else would you have me do?''

Ana said thoughtfully, ''One has so little contact with the rest of the world here. I would like very much an opportunity to discuss this with others. Perhaps with my own delegation at the United Nations?''

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"Why not?" exclaimed Margie. She looked thoughtful for a moment, and then nodded. "I'll tell you what. As soon as training's over, we're all going to get three days off. I'm going to New York myself. Come with me. We'll eat some decent food, go to a few parties. And you can talk it over with anyone you like. Agreed?"

Ana hesitated. At last, unwillingly, she said, "All right, Miss Menninger. That sounds attractive." It did not, for many reasons, but as a just person Ana had to concede that it sounded at least fair.

"Fine, honey. Now, if you don't mind, I'm overdue for a long, hot bath."

Margie locked the door behind the Bulgarian woman and ran herself a tub with some satisfaction. What the stupid prunt didn't know was that she was leaving Camp Detrick directly for the launch pad. The next chance she would have to talk anything over with anybody would be on Klong, and there let her say whatever she liked.

★

Ana Dimitrova sat with her eyes closed in a broad, low room, elbows on a ring-shaped table, head in her hands, earphones on her head. Her lips were moving. Her head twitched from side to side as she tried to match the rhythms of the taped balloonist song that was coming over the headset. It was very difficult, in large part because it was not a balloonist's voice making the sounds. It was a krinpit's. The tape had been made several weeks before, when Detrick's last surviving krinpit had had no one left to talk to but Shirley, the one surviving balloonist.

But her name had not been Shirley. Her name, rather beautifully, had been *mo'ahi' i ba' alu' i*, which meant something like Sweetly Golden Cloud-Bearer. Krinpit rasps and tympani did not easily form the balloonist sounds. But Shirley had understood him—no, Ana corrected herself, Mo'ahi'i Ba'alu'i had understood him. Ana was determined to do the same, and so she played and replayed sections of the tape:

Ma'iya'a hi'i—these creatures unlike us—*hu'u ha'iye'i*—are vicious animals.

And Cloud-Bearer's response: *Ni'u'a mali'i na'a hu'iha*. They have killed my song.

Ana pushed the headphones off her ears and allowed herself to rub her eyes. The headaches were very bad tonight. And this awful room! Twenty headsets and tape-control panels before twenty identical hard-backed chairs, all around the ring. So bleak! So unsympathetic!

Unsympathetic? Ana clucked her lips at herself. That was one of the English language's booby-trap words: Sympathetic, *simpatico*. They sounded so much alike. But they did not mean the same thing, and it was embarrassing to a translator of Ana's skills to fall into the blunder of confusing them. It proved she was too tired to work any more this night, and so decisively she switched off the tape, hung the earphones on their hook and stood up to go. She intended to wish a courteous good night to those few other eager project personnel who had shared her desire to put in over-

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time at the tape ring. But there weren't any. They had all left while she was concentrating.

★

It was nearly eleven o'clock! In six hours she would have to be getting out of bed!

Hurrying down the empty company street toward her room, Ana paused halfway, changed course and entered the dayroom. Really, these headaches were too bad! But there was a dispensing machine in the dayroom, and sometimes one of the American soft drinks containing caffeine would constrict the blood vessels and reduce the thumping, tumping throb long enough for her to get to sleep.

But as she dropped a dollar into the machine and waited for the cup to fill, it seemed to her that coming here had been a mistake, after all. Such an ear-drubbing of noise! A dozen couples were dancing frenziedly to a stereo at one end of the room. At the other a young Oriental man had a guitar, and a group was singing with him, quite at cross-purposes to the music on the stereo. Quite uncaring. And even more noise came from the television alcove: a babble of excited voices, laughter, what could they be watching? She drifted closer to peer at the screen. Someone was lifting a pillowcase out of a sonic washer and exclaiming rapturously over its pristine shine. Were these people excited over a commercial?

"Oh, Ana," cried her roommate, elbowing toward her. "You missed it. She was *wonderful*."

"What? What did I miss? Who was wonderful?"

"Lieutenant-Colonel Menninger. It was really super. You know," confided the woman, "I never really liked her. But tonight she was just beautiful. She was on the six o'clock news. It was just a little person-to-person interview, like a follow-up to a story about Jem. I don't know why they picked her. But I'm glad they did! She said such wonderful things! She said Jem gave hope to all the unhappy people of the world. She said it was a planet where all the old hatreds could be forgotten. A place where—what did she say?—yes, a place where each child could elect a morality and an idea, and have the space and the freedom to live his life by it!"

Ana coughed Coca-Cola in a fine spray into her cupped hand. "Colonel Menninger said that?" she gasped.

"Yes, yes, Ana, and she said it beautifully. We were all touched. Even people like Stud Sweggert and Nguyen the Tryin' were *really* moved. I mean, they even kept their hands to themselves. And the newscaster said something about sending troops to Jem, and Colonel Menninger said, 'I'm a soldier myself. Every country has soldiers like me, and every one of us prays we'll never have anything to do. But on Jem we can do something useful! Something for peace, not for destruction. Please let us do it.'— What?"

Ana had been marveling to herself in Bulgarian. "No, no, please go on," she said.

"Well. And just now they repeated parts of it on the late report,

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and they said the public response has been incredible. Telegrams, phone calls. To the White House, and the U.N., and the networks—I don't know where all."

Ana forgot her headache. "Perhaps I have been doing Colonel Menninger an injustice. Truly, I am amazed."

"Well, I am too! But she made me feel really good about what we're doing, and everyone's talking about it!"

And they were. Not only in the barracks dayroom. Senator Lenz's phones were ringing, and it was constituents urging him to make sure the heroes on Jem got support. Newsrooms around the country were watching the electronic tally of calls from the public: Jem, Jem! Spot pollsters were reporting great and growing public concern. God Menninger's phone rang only once, but the person on the other end was the President of the United States. When he hung up Menninger's face was tense and stern, but then it relaxed and he broke into a smile. "Honey," he said to empty space, "damn your black heart, you do your old man proud."

XIII

For twenty kilometers Charley and his flock tried to follow the little biplane as it chugged and bounced through the sky of Jem. No use. The balloonists soared high, swooped low, found winds that carried them toward the heat pole, but never fast enough to keep up. Charlie sang a mournful farewell song into his radio as they turned away, and the sound penetrated even the noisy rattle of the little engine inside the plane. "Too much noise," shouted Kappelyushnikov cheerfully into Danny Dalehouse's ear. "Turn off, please?"

"Let me say good-bye first." Dalehouse sang into the tiny radio, then switched it off. Far behind, and half a kilometer overhead, the flock bobbed acknowledgment. Dalehouse craned his neck to see forward, but the camp of the Greasies was of course nowhere yet in sight. They were flying almost directly toward the Heat Pole—"southeast" by the convention of considering the poles of rotation north and south, however irrelevant that was to compasses and sextants—and it was uphill almost all the way. How foolish of the Greasies to locate their camp in the least hospitable part of the planet! But who could figure why the Greasies did things?

Kappelyushnikov leaned over and slapped him on the shoulder. "You wish to puke?" he called encouragingly, pointing over the side of the cockpit. Dalehouse shook his head. "Is all right, you know," Cappy went on. "Is little rough, yes. We are fighting winds, not making love to them like in balloon. But you have truly outstanding aircraft technician in charge!"

"I'm not complaining." And in fact, he had no reason to complain. The biplane was a technological marvel on Klong—on Jem, he reminded himself, as they were supposed to call it now. At least they were flying! The Greasy camp was hard to reach any other way. There were no cars on Jem, because no

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roads. Only a tracked vehicle could go very far, and even the Greasies did not have them to spare. Because, in their pigheaded way, the Greasies had camped ten kilometers from the nearest usable water, boats were out. You could fly there for this semi-summit meeting that was supposed to make everyone on Jem friends again. Or you could walk. And Dalehouse spared a thought of compassion for the poor, proud, pedestrian Peeps, who were no doubt doing just that somewhere below.

So just to be flying was a triumph, although he wished Cappy had not brought up the subject of airsickness. It was not the motion that was bothering him as much as the food they had been eating. With twenty-two more mouths to feed, the old catch-as-catch-can meal style was down the drain. Unfortunately, the new people had brought their appetites, but they had forgotten to pack a chef to satisfy them. The food was unbearable. No one dared complain. The person who bitched would be the next cook.

Still, the community was growing. The third resupply ship had brought a great deal. This sputtering little two-winged airplane, folded and stacked and foolish-looking, but demonstrably workable, because it was working. The little plutonium-powered machines and instruments that had given Morrissey sensors to study the Creepies in their tunnels under ground and Dalehouse himself radios to pass on to Charlie. A new Argus orbiter to photograph clouds and help them predict the weather. Or at least to guess at it a little more accurately.

It had even helped them in their attempts to make contact with sentients. Sort of. Charlie was delighted with his crossbow and his radio. Jim Morrissey had taken another tack. He had used the new power auger to make three widely spaced holes along a Creepy burrow. The end holes held soft charges of explosives, the center one a hose connected to the exhaust of the auger's little gasoline putt-putt. When Morrissey blew the charges he sealed both ends of that section of the tunnel, and the carbon monoxide caught four burrowers before they could dig away. By then they were no good for Dalehouse's purposes any more, of course, but they were a joy to Morrissey.

Even further marvels were on their way. The third resupply had brought eight metric tons of equipment, but according to the tachtran messages the next would bring nearly fifty, plus maybe a hundred additional personnel. It would be a city! The summons to the meeting at the Fuel camp had not only been a welcome tour of Jem, it had been a reprieve from the tedium of erecting tents to receive the reinforcements.

What the tachtran had failed to say was just what the reinforcements would be used for. They certainly needed any number of specialists they didn't have. A cook. A dentist. Some better-looking women. A better translator— Reminded, Dalehouse leaned back to see how Harriet was faring behind him.

The translator was most uncomfortably curled up in a space no more than a meter square, and stud-

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ded, at that, with bolts and levers that must have been tattooing Harriet's hips and ribs indelibly. If she had been anyone else Dalehouse would have thought of some friendly, commiserating remark. For Harriet he could find none. Her eyes were closed. Her expression registered resignation to the palpable injustice of being the smallest of the three of them, and thus the one to be squeezed into the tiny rear compartment.

"Getting close," Kappelyushnikov bawled in his ear.

Dalehouse leaned forward, rubbing at the glass as though the Jemman murk were on the inside, rather than all around. There was nothing but maroon cloud—

Then the stark white rim of the Heat Pole glittered through a break. And something else. The clouds themselves were clearly bright. As the biplane tunneled out of the last of the cloud bank they were leaving, Dalehouse saw the cause before him.

"Jesus Christ!" cried Kappelyushnikov. "Have they no shame?"

The light was the Oily camp. It stood out on the horizon like a bonfire, penetrating Jem's dour maroon murk with beacons, lighted windows, my God, Dalehouse marveled, even street lamps! It was no longer an expeditionary camp. It looked like a small town.

The vertical beacon began to sweep across the biplane to acknowledge their approach—then courteously away, so that they were not dazzled. Kappelyushnikov muttered inaudibly into his radio mouthpiece, listened for a moment and then began to circle. "What's the matter?" Dalehouse demanded.

"Is nothing the matter, only we are no longer in hurry," said the pilot. "Peeps will be unavoidably one hour detained, so let us study this miracle before landing on it."

A miracle it very nearly was. There were only about forty people in the Greasy camp, but they seemed to have almost that many buildings. *Buildings*. Not tents or plastic huts; what had they made them out of? And what buildings! Some were barracks, some seemed individual bungalows. One looked more like a tenth-size copy of the Eiffel Tower than any structure one could live or work in. Another was a good twenty-five meters in length. And—what was that curious shallow round petaled cone on the far side of the camp? It seemed to be constructed of bent strips of shiny metal arrayed around a central black cylinder. Could it be a solar generator? If so, it was almost megawatt size! And—that stubby tower with the horizontally rotating fan. Wasn't that the exhaust from an *air conditioner*?

★

Over the rattles and groans that came from his Krinpit escort, Ahmed Dulla heard a sputtering distant sound. "Put me down. Wait. Try to be quiet," he called peevishly in the mixture of Urdu and their own language that made communication possible between them. Or sometimes did. He lowered himself from the litter in which they had been carrying him and climbed onto a knee of a many-tree, pushing aside the pinkly glowing

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fronds to stare around the sky. A tiny two-winged aircraft was chuttering along just below cloud level. "So. Another triumph of technology arrives," he said.

The Krinpit, Jorrn-fteet, reared back to study him more carefully, its stubby claws waving. "Your meaning is not loud," it rattled.

"No matter. Let us move on." Dulla was in no mood for a nice chat with grossly hypertrophied bugs, however useful they were being to him. "Go, carry the litter and my bag, I will walk," he ordered. "It is too steep here for riding." They were climbing from the shallow valley of the river now, up through the last of the forested slopes onto the dry highlands. The vegetation began to change from many-trees and ferns to things like succulents, stubby barrels with glowing bright-red luminous buttons. Dulla looked at them all with distaste. Study the plants, find new products, it is in this way that my fathers became independent of the machines of the outside world. So Feng Hua-tse had advised before he left; but Dulla was an astrophysicist, not a herbal healer, and he had no intention of following the fool's instructions.

There was no overhang between him and the sky now and he could see the little biplane circling, far off toward the bright white line of the Heat Pole. So. The Greasies had their helicopter, the Fats now had a plane, and what did the representative of the People's Republic have to take him to his meeting? A litter, carried by animals that looked like squashed crustaceans. Dulla fumed. If Feng had listened to him, they would have insisted that the three-party meeting be held at their own camp. So they would have been spared this humiliation of arriving on a plastic frame carried by creatures out of some children's nonsense fable—if not the humiliation of exposing to the Fats and the Oilies the meanness of their encampment. What a disaster! And all Feng's fault. Or Heir-of-Mao's; the expedition should have been properly supplied and reinforced in the first place, but leave it to the Chinamen to hoard coppers to the ruination of the project.

Without warning the Krinpit stopped and Dulla, lost in his thoughts, almost tripped over them. "What, what?" he complained. "Why are you standing here?"

"A very loud thing moves quickly," rattled Jorrn-fteet.

"I do not hear anything." But now that he was awakened from his reverie he did see something, a swell of dust behind the hills. As he watched, a machine topped the rise, coming toward him. It was still a kilometer away, but it looked like a halftrack.

"Another triumph of conspicuous waste," sneered Dulla. "How dare they come for me, as though I could not make the journey by myself?" The Krinpit rattled inquiringly, and he added, "Never mind. Put down the litter, I will carry my knapsack myself now. Hide yourselves. I do not want the Greasies to see you."

But the words conveyed no meaning to the Krinpit. A Krinpit could never hide from another Krinpit as long as they were close enough to hear each other. Dulla struggled to

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explain: "Go back to the place behind the hill. The Fats will not hear you there. I will return in the space it took us to come up from the river." He was not sure they understood that, either. The Krinpit had a clear sense of time, but the vocabulary of terms to mark its units did not map well from one language, based on a diurnal cycle, to another which had evolved on a planet without easy temporal reference points. But they lurched away obediently and Dulla walked steadily toward the approaching halftrack.

The driver was a Kuwaiti, apparently a translator, because he greeted Dulla in flawless Urdu. "Would you like a lift?" he called. "Jump in!"

"You are very courteous," smiled Dulla. "Indeed, it is a little warm for strolling today." But it was not courtesy at all, he fumed internally, it was only more of their damnable arrogance! Ahmed Dulla was quite sure that he was the only person on Jem whose native language was Urdu, and here the Greasies had made sure they had someone who could speak to him! As though he himself were not already proficient in four other languages!

The time would come, he promised himself, when he would humble their swinish ostentation. So he rode up over the gullied hills toward the Greasy camp, chatting amiably with the Kuwaiti, remarking politely on the fine appearance of their camp, his face smiling and his heart swelling with rage.

★

The official host for the meeting was named Chesley Pontrefact, London-born but not of native roots that went many generations back. His skin was purplish-brown and his hair white wool. Coded tachtran messages had given Dulla a good deal of background on every member of the Greasy expeditions, as well as the Fats, and he knew that Pontrefact was an Air Vice Marshal and nominal commander of the Greasy expedition. But he also knew that real power belonged to one of the civilians from Saudi Arabia. Pontrefact bustled about the long conference table (wood! shipped all the way from Earth!), offering drinks and smokes. "Brandy do you, Dr. Dalehouse?" he inquired solicitously. "And perhaps a Coca-Cola for you, sir?" I'm afraid we don't have orange juice, but at least there's ice."

"Nothing, please," said Dulla, seething. Ice! "I suggest we begin our meeting, if that is convenient."

"Certainly, Dr. Dulla." Pontrefact sat down heavily at the head of the table and glanced inquiringly around. "Mind if I take the chair, just for form's sake?"

Dulla watched to see if anyone from the Fats was going to object, and spoke a split-second before they did. "Not at all, Marshal Pontrefact." he said warmly. "We are your guests." But one should show courtesy to guests, and what was this seating arrangment but a deliberate insult? Pontrefact at the head, two of his associates at the foot, the Kuwaiti translator and a woman who could be no one but the Saudi civilian who was the Greasies' decision-maker. On one side of the

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table were all three of the Fats, Dalehouse, their Russian pilot and their own translator; and on the other—only himself. How much more deliberately could they point out that he was alone and insignificant? He added diffidently, "Since we are all conversant, I believe, with English, perhaps we can dispense with the translators. It is an old saying of my people that the success of a conference is inversely proportional to the square of the number of participants."

Quickly, "I shall stay," said the Fats translator. Pontrefact raised his white-caterpillar eyebrows but said nothing; Dulla shrugged politely and gazed toward the chair, waiting for the proceedings to begin.

The Saudi whispered to the interpreter at some length. Across the table, Dalehouse hesitated, then got up to reach across the table. "Good to see you looking fit, Ahmed," he said.

Dulla touched his hand minimally. "Thank you." And, grudgingly, "And thank you for assisting in returning me to my own camp. I have not had a chance to express my gratitude since."

"Glad to help. Anyway, it's good to see someone from your expedition—we don't see many of you, you know."

Dulla glared. Then, stiffly, "I have come a long way for this meeting. Can we not begin?"

"Oh, hell," said Pontrefact from the head of the table. "Look, mates. The whole reason for this meeting is to try to work together better. We know what a balls-up our masters have made of Home. Shall we see if we can do a bit better here?"

Dulla said happily, "Please limit your observations to your own people." It was as he had suspected, the Greasies were going to insult everyone but themselves. Let this West Indian whose grandfather was a ticket-collector on the London Underground make a fool of himself, if he chose. Not of the People's Republics.

"But I'm in dead earnest, Dr. Dulla. We invited you here because it's clear we are all working at cross purposes. Your own camp is in serious trouble, and we all know it. The Food people and our own lot are a bit better off, yes. But you don't have a proper doctor, do you, Dr. Dalehouse? Not to mention a few other things. And we can't be expected—That is, we don't have limitless resources either. Under the U.N. resolution we are all supposed to cooperate and divide the responsibilities. Particularly the science. We undertook the geology, and you can't say we haven't played fair about that. We've done a great deal."

"Indeed so," put in Kappelyushnikov blandly. "Is pure coincidence that most is in personal vicinity and relates primarily to fissionables and to salt domes."

"That is, to petroleum," Dulla agreed. "Yes, I think we are all aware of that, Marshal Pontrefact." How thoughtful of the Fats and the Greasies to begin quarreling among themselves so soon!

"Be that as it may," the chairman went on doggedly. "There's a hell of a lot to be done here and we can't do it all. Astronomy, for instance. We did orbit a satellite observatory, but as I am sure you

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know—it ran into malfunctions. Let me show you something." He got up and moved to a likris screen on the wall. When he had fiddled with it for a moment the crystals sprang into vari-colored light showing some sort of graph. "You've seen our solar generator. This shows the solar input for our power-plant. As you see, there are spikes in the curve. This may not seem important to you, but our generator is a precision instrument. It isn't going to do its job properly if the solar constant isn't, well, constant."

Dulla stared in black envy at the graph. That was what he was here for, after all, because he was a specialist in stellar studies! He hardly noticed when Dalehouse put in, "If Kung is acting up, it may mean more to us than a few wiggles in your power supply."

Pontrefact nodded. "Of course it may. We notified this to Herstmonceux-Greenwich with a copy of the tape. They're quite upset about it. Kung may be a variable star."

"Hardly," sneered Dulla. "It is known that a few flares are possible."

"But it is not known how many, or how big; and that's exactly what we need to know. What, if I may say, we confidently expected to know from the astronomical researches that were meant to be conducted by your expedition, Dr. Dulla."

Dulla exploded, "But this is too much! How can one practice astrophysics when one is hungry? And whose fault is that?"

"Certainly not ours, old chap," Pontrefact said indignantly.

"But someone blew up our ships, *old chap*. Someone killed thirty-four citizens of the People's Republics, old chap!"

"But that was—" Pontrefact stopped the sentence in mid-syllable. He made a visible effort to control his temper. "Be that as it may," he got out again, "the plain fact is the work's got to be done and someone's got to do it. You have the instruments, and we don't, at least not until proper telescopes arrive from Earth. We have the manpower, and you evidently don't."

"I beg your pardon. Allow me to inform you of my academic standing. I am director of the Planetology Institute at Zulkifar Ali Bhutto University and have graduate degrees in astrophysics from—"

"But no one's disputing your degrees, dear man, only your fitness to function. Let us send our own astronomer over. Better still, let Boyne airlift your equipment here, where there's better seeing—"

"Certainly not! Not either!"

"I really don't think that's quite fair, do you? We've certainly cooperated in providing food, for instance—"

"Such food! For your people, not for ours: all flour, hardly any rice."

Dalehouse said placatingly, "We'll turn up some rice for you, if that's what you like."

"How gracious of you!" Dulla sneered.

"Now, wait a minute, Dulla. We've done our best for you—and we have a couple of complaints of our own, if you want to know. Like shooting at me!"

Dulla grimaced. "That was only

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Hua-tse's foolishness with fireworks. The People's Republics have already expressed their regrets."

"To whom? The dead balloonists?"

"Yes," sneered Dulla, with exaggerated humility, "of course, it is so, we do apologize to your close friends, the comic gasbags. And to yours too, sir, the vermin that dig in the earth whom you find so useful!"

"If you mean the Creeps," said Pontrefact, his control of his temper wearing thin, "at least we don't use them as litter bearers."

"No! You use them to help exploit the mineral riches! Is it not true that there has been radiation disease among them?"

"No, it isn't! At least, not here. We did use a few to dig samples for us in other areas, and, yes, they did encounter some radiation, but I must say that I resent the imputation that we are exploiting the natives."

"Oh, I am sure you would not do that, Marshal Pontrefact, especially as your own ancestors must have experienced so much of that from the other side, as it were."

"Now, look here, Dulla!" But Pontrefact was interrupted by the Saudi woman, who said:

"I think we should recess for lunch. We have much to discuss, and shouting at each other will not help. Let's resolve to try to do better in the afternoon."

★

Thirty meters below the airstrip, Mother dr'Shee woke with the smell of cyanide in her splayed nose, too faint to be dangerous, too strong to ignore. The Shelled Devils were at it again.

She yipped peremptorily for the brood-member on duty. It turned out to be t'Weechr, the runt of the litter and the one the others saddled with the least attractive jobs—including, she realized justly, attending to the wants of the Mother when she first woke up. There were only seven in this present brood of hers, and all of them male, and none of them the size, or the strength, or the wit of their father. It was a loose and unsettling time, and it spoiled her temper. "Food," she ordered harshly. "And drink. And someone to groom me while I am waiting."

t'Weechr said humbly, "There is no one but me, Brood Mother. I will be quick with the food, and groom you while you eat."

"And why is there no one?"

"The New Devils are teaching, Brood Mother. All are commanded to be present."

"Tssheee." If dr'Shee had been a human, the sound would have been a grunt, written "Humph" for convenience's sake. But she was not actually displeased, merely fretful; and when t'Weechr returned it was not only with tubers, and a shell of water, but there were even some fresh leaves and fruits from Above. "Taken or given?" She demanded, sniffing them suspiciously.

"These were gifts of the New Devils, Brood Mother," the youth apologized.

"Tssheee." They were, however, tasty, and she was hungry. She defecated neatly into the shell when she was finished, and t'Weechr folded it closed.

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"Is there any other service, Brood Mother?" he asked, licking a final strand of her fur into neatness.

"No. Be gone." He touched noses and wriggled away to deliver the package to the rotting rooms. The next brood would mix it with the planting mud, and plaster it into the ceilings of the farm tunnels when they prepared the next crops. By then it would be well aged, and of great value in growing the tubers. Runt or not, t'Weechr was a good child. She would miss him when the litter matured and scattered. And that time was not far off. At every awakening now her dugs had been smaller and harder. The breeding males knew it, and every time she left her nest they wriggled close to touch her, nose-to-anus, testing to see how near she was to courtship. Only yesterday the male with the scarred leg had said, half jesting, "What would you like next time, dr'Shee? Krinpit shell? A live Flying Devil? The Head of a New Devil?"

"Your own head," she had said, half irritated, half flirtatious. He had snorted laughter through the spreading folds of his nose and crept away, but he would be back. It was not an unpleasing thought. dr'Shee's brood-sister had mated with that one, two litters ago. A fine brood, three females! And the sister had said he was indefatigable at rut. Well. A proper courtship was a proper courtship, but she could not help hoping that he might turn out to be the male with the finest gift to lay before her.

Faint and distant vibrations in the earth set her whiskers to quivering. That was the New Devils, too. Time was when such tremors had meant only a particularly violent thunderstorm Above, or perhaps the crash of a falling many-tree. Now the New Devils scraped and shoved hillocks and boulders around at will, and the earth was no longer easy to her senses. As she moved around her chamber, sniffing and touching to make sure everything was in its place, it was touch and smell and taste that principally guided her. Sometimes her males had plastered bits of fungus and vegetation into the walls, along with the secretions that made their tunnel walls hard and water-proof, and from the plant decay there was some faint glow. dr'Shee appreciated the light, but did not need it. For her people eyes were almost a handicap, especially on their infrequent dashes to the surface, when only the densest of cloud and worst of storms dimmed Kung's radiance enough for them to bear.

"Greeting, dr'Shee."

She sniffed in startlement, and then recognized the female at the entrance to her chamber. "How are you, qr'Tshew? Come in, come in."

The other female entered, and dr'Shee said at once, "I will send for food."

"I have eaten," said qr'Tshew politely. "What lovely courtship gifts." She fondled dr'Tshee's collection. Six breedings, six fine gifts: a hard thing stolen from the New Devils that no one understood, the leg of a crabrat—that had been her first gift, and the least worthy, but in some way the most satisfying of her courtship gifts. Even the claws of a balloonist. Every one had been

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stolen from the Surface itself, at great risk, and delivered to her at a cost. Few males survived more than two or three mad, half-blinded dashes to the Surface to steal courtship gifts. The enemies were everywhere.

Manners satisfied, qr'Tshew came to the point. "The father of my last brood has died of a bad breathing," she said. "Also three young of other mothers."

"What a pity," said dr'Shee. She was not referring to the male, of course, once a male had achieved breeding he was done, for that female. But to have young die of the cyanide gas!

"I fear for our way of life," said qr'Tshew primly. "Since the New Devils came, our litters have not been the same."

"I have had the same thought," dr'Shee admitted. "I have spoken of it to my sisters."

"And I to mine, and I and my sisters have thought something we wish to share. Our young are being taught things by the New Devils. dr'Shee, shouldn't we mothers learn what the litters are learning?"

"But they are learning ways of bringing death! You and I are mothers qr'Tshew!" dr'Shee was shocked.

"The Krinpit bring death to us, do they not? The broods in the upper galleries have blocked off the tunnels where the bad air came from, but is it not certain that the Shelled Devils will break through again and more bad air will come?"

"I cannot bring death, except of course for food."

"Then let us eat them, shells and all," said qr'Tshew grimly. "Touch closely, dr'Shee. There is a story—" She hesitated. "I do not know how true it is. It came from a Krinpit, and might as well have come from a Flying Devil." That was an old saying to indicate dubiousness, but in this case, dr'Shee realized, it was actually true. "This Shelled Devil taunted one of my sister's brood by saying that New Devils had destroyed an entire city of our race. He said the New Devils thought of us as vermin, and would not rest until we are all gone. That is why they have given the Krinpit the bad air."

"But the New Devils are teaching our litters how to destroy Krinpit."

"The next part of the story is puzzling, but I think it is so. The Shelled Devil says that there are three kinds of New Devils. One kind destroyed the city. Another kind gave them the bad air with which they harm us here. And the kind that teaches our litters is a third kind. They have destroyed Flying Devils and Krinpit, as well as persons of the two other kinds of their own race. But they do not destroy us."

dr'Shee thrashed her long, supple body in agitation. "But that is not true!" she cried. "They have taken several litters from their classes to some other place, and only a few have returned. And they have been weak and slow, and speak of their brood-mates dying!"

"My sisters and I have heard this also," agreed qr'Tshew.

"Tsshee!" The petaled folds of dr'Shee's nose were rippling furiously. "It feels," she said at length, "as though the teaching of

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bringing death is not a bad thing. If we bring death to the Krinpit, then they will not be able to bring more bad air to us. If we help our New Devils to bring death to the others, then they will not be able to aid the Krinpit or the Flying Devils against us."

"I have had this same thought, dr'Shee."

"I have a further thought, qr'Tshew. Once we have brought death to these others, perhaps we can then bring death to our own New Devils."

"And then our litters will be ours again, dr'Shee!"

"And our burrows will be safe and dark. Yes! Do not go away, qr'Tshew. I will summon t'Weechr and he will begin to teach us these lessons!"

XIV

Even in Jem's favorable conditions, air denser, gravity less than Earth, there was a peremptory equation of lift. Danny Dalehouse could carry what he could carry, and there was an end to it. To carry any of Dalehouse's gifts meant sacrificing ballast and therefore mobility. To carry them all was impossible. When Dalehouse scolded him for giving the crossbow to a flockmate—at a time when the ha'aye'i seemed everywhere!—Charley sang placatingly, "But I must keep the speaker-to-air! I cannot have both, cannot have both."

"And if you are killed by a ha'aye'i, what good will the radio do you?" But Charley didn't even seem to understand the question. He and the flock were singing a sort of rhapsody about the speaker-to-air and how it enriched their chorus, and Dalehouse abandoned the effort. Charley's possession of the radio wasn't all good. It meant that Dalehouse could really keep in contact with the flock from the ground, as long as they stayed in line of sight or somewhere near it, and that fact had not escaped Major Santangelo, the new camp commandant. It was getting harder to escape into the air. At the same time, it was getting less attractive to stay in the camp. Santangelo had established command at once. He had proved it by sending Harriet and Alex Woodring off to try to make contact with a distant tribe of burrowers, uncontaminated, they hoped, by contact with the Greasies. And the camp was being run on increasingly strict military lines.

Dalehouse broke through the flock's song. "I must return. Four more flocks of our people are joining us and I wish to be there when they arrive."

"We will come with you, we will come with you—"

"No, you won't," he contradicted. "Too many ha'aye'i near the camp." That was the truth, and that, too, was a consequence of the "gifts" he had given them. Since the Oilies had found out that Santangelo's "scientific instruments" were being used by the balloonists to keep tabs on what was going on in their camp they had taken to shooting down every balloonist that came within a kilometer of them. So balloonists were growing locally scarce, and the predators were getting hungry. "Fly by the Wet Val-

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leys," he commanded. "Learn if our people are well there."

"No need," sang Charley. "See the wings of your friend Ha'y coming from there even now!" And back behind the shoreline there it was, Cappy's little biplane coming back from visiting the outpost, circling in for a landing.

"Then good-bye," sang Dalehouse, and expertly vented hydrogen until he came down to the level of the on-shore winds that carried him back to the camp.

He was getting really good at ballooning, and he was smiling as he drifted down over the commandant's pet project, the little mud fort on the shore, and dropped to earth on the first bluff. He gathered up the deflated balloons, slung their loose netted bulk over his shoulder and walked happily enough up to the hydrogen shed.

That was the end of happiness. Half the camp was gathered around Kappelyushnikov and Santangelo, farther up the hill. Jim Morrissey and a half dozen others were coming toward him, their faces grim. Dalehouse caught Morrissey's arm as he passed. "What's the matter?" he demanded.

Morrissey paused. "Trouble, Danny. Something's happened to the out-camp. Harriet, Woodring, Dugarchenko—they're missing. Cappy says the camps's been ripped apart, and they're gone."

"Harriet?"

"All of them, damn it! And there's blood and Krinpit tracks all over the place. Let go, we've got to get down to Castle Santangelo—in case they invade by sea, I guess. Anyway, you'd better get up there and see what your orders are."

Orders! How like an Army officer to over-react and start issuing orders in all directions! Dalehouse let them go past and walked belligerently up to the group around Santangelo and the pilot. Someone was saying, "—I didn't know there were any Krinpit in the Wet Valleys."

"If you were in Beverly Hills you wouldn't know there were any rattlesnakes in California, either, but if you wandered around Hollywood Hills they'd bite your ass off. That's enough for arguing," the major said. "Those of you with assigned defense posts, get to them. We've got four ships coming in in the next twenty hours. It'd be a good time for anybody to catch us off guard, and we're not going to be caught. Move it!"

Dalehouse, who had been given no assigned defense post, was not anxious to get one. He moved away briskly with the others as the group broke up, circling around the outskirts to approach the communications shack.

Inside, the comm team on duty was watching a continually shifting display of moving symbols against a green grid of coordinate lines: the four resupply ships, already in orbit around Jem, were making their final course corrections before dropping down to the surface. Dalehouse had expected Kappelyushnikov to show up there and he did, moments after Dalehouse himself.

"Ah, Danny," he said dismally, "you have good taste for finding nice place to fuck off. Wait one while I see if asshole traffic controller has accidentally got ships in

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right orbit." He peered into the screen, grumbled at the crew on duty, then shrugged and returned to Dalehouse. "Is on course," he reported. "Now question is, is course right? We find out. Poor Gasha!"

"Are you sure she's dead?"

"Have not seen corpus delicti, no. But, Danny, there was very much blood, two liters at least."

"But you didn't see the bodies."

"No, Danny, did not. Saw blood. Saw tents chopped up to fine Venetian lace, clothes all over, food, radio smashed, little scratchy bug-tracks everywhere I looked. No bodies. So I yelled some, listened, poked into bushes. Then came home. So poor Gasha, not to mention poor Alexei and poor Gregor."

Danny shook his head wonderingly. "The Krinpit are damn noisy beasts. I don't see how they could catch the camp by surprise, and if they weren't surprised they should've been able to take care of themselves. Santangelo made them carry guns."

Kappelyushnikov shrugged. "You want to, I fly you there and you study scene of crime for yourself. Right now, excuse. First ship is about to come out of orbit and I must keep controller up to personal high standard of accuracy."

★

Half the personnel in the first ship were a combat team—a fact which would have come as a distinctly unpleasant shock to Dalehouse at one time, but now seemed less so. While still in orbit, the Vietnamese colonel commanding them had been briefed by radio; the squad formed up outside the ship as they debarked, and immediately drew weapons and trotted to reinforce the perimeter guards. The second ship was also mostly military, but among them was a face Dalehouse recognized. It took him a moment to make the connection, but then it was clear: the Bulgarian girl who had interceded for him and Marge Menninger in Sofia. He called to her and waved; she looked startled, then smiled, rather attractively, he thought, and called a greeting. That was as far as it went just then. By then the new colonel had conferred with Major Santangelo, and the whole camp was mobilized. The Vietnamese—his name was Tree—commandeered Kappelyushnikov and the airplane, and they were gone for more than two hours, orbiting the camp in widening circles, first at high altitude, then nearly brushing the tops of the trees. All the tents had to come down. By the time the third rocket landed the tents were up again, now lined up six to a row, four rows paralleling each other, in what had become a company street. At each corner of the encampment pits were dug, and out of the third ship came machine-guns and flamethrowers to go into them, while the few rankless non-specialists who had not been tapped for unloading, tent detail or pit digging had been set to pounding steel stakes into the ground ten meters outside the limits of the camp. Among the third ship's cargo was two huge reels of barbed wire, and by the time the last ship began its drop they had been strung along the

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stakes.

★

For once the Jemman skies were almost clear as the fourth ship came into sight, high over the far horizon of the ocean-lake. First there was a broad, bright meteoritic splash of light as the ablative entry shields soaked up the worst of the excess energy and spilled it away in incandescent shards. Then the ship itself was in naked-eye vision, falling free for a moment. A quick blue-white jet flare made a course correction. Then the trigger parachute came free, pulling the three main chutes after it. The ship seemed to hang almost motionless in the ruddy air, but slowly, slowly it grew larger until it was almost overhead, two hundred meters up. Then the chutes were jettisoned and the ship lowered itself on its blinding, ear-destroying rockets to the beach.

Dalehouse had seen, he counted, five of those landings now, not counting the one he himself had been in. They were all almost miraculous to watch. And they were all different. The ships themselves were different. Of the new four, only one was the tall, silver shape of his own ship. The other three were squat double cones, ten meters from rounded top to rounded bottom as they crouched on their landing struts, nearly twenty meters across at their widest.

The first person out of the ship was Marge Menninger.

It was not a surprise. The surprising part was that she hadn't come earlier. Dalehouse realized he had been half expecting her on every ship that landed. She looked tired, disheveled, and harried, and obviously she had been sleeping in her olive-drab fatigues for all of the transit-time week. But she also looked pretty good to Dalehouse. The female members of the Food Bloc party had not been chosen for their sexuality. Apart from a rare occasional grapple with someone he didn't really like very much—sometimes impelled by tickling one of the balloonists into parting with a few sprays of joy-juice, sometimes by nothing more than boredom—Dalehouse's sex life had been sparse, joyless and dull. Margie reminded him of better times.

Margie had also come up in the world since Sofia; the insignia on her collar tabs were no longer captain's bars but full colonel's eagles, and as she moved aside to let the rest of the troops debark, Colonel Tree and Major Santangelo were already beginning to report to her. She listened attentively, while her eyes were taking inventory of the camp, the defense perimeter and the progress of the debarkation. Then she began speaking in short, quick sentences. Dalehouse was not close enough to hear the words, but there was no doubt that the sentences were orders. Tree argued about something. Good-humoredly, Margie slipped her arm around his shoulder while she answered, then patted his bottom as he moved off, scowling, to do as he was told. She and Santangelo moved up toward the command center, still talking; and Dalehouse began to revise his notions of what to expect from seeing Margie Menninger again.

But as they approached where he

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was standing she caught sight of him and threw out her arms. "Hey, Dan! Beautiful to see you!" She kissed him enthusiastically. "You're looking real fine, you know? Or as close to fine as you can in this light."

"You, too," he said. "And congratulations."

"On what, being here? Oh, you mean the eagles. Well, they had to give me that to handle Guy Tree. Dimitrova ought to be around somewhere, have you seen her? Now if we could only get the Pak to come for a visit we could all have a nice time talking over good old days in the Bulgarian slammer."

"Colonel Menninger—"

"All right, Major, I'm coming. Stay loose, Dan. We've got catching up to do."

He stared after her. In the old Rotsy days in college, before he had dropped out as it became clear that nobody would ever need to fight wars any more, colonels had seemed quite different. It wasn't just that she was female. And pretty. And young. Colonels seemed to have more on their minds than Margie Menninger did—especially colonels coming into a situation where the panic button had been so recently pressed.

★

"Hello, Dr. Dalehouse," came Ana Dimitrova's voice. "Mr. Kappelyushnikov said you'd be here. Kappelyushnikov said you'd be. But I must confess I was not sure he was in earnest."

Dalehouse opened his eyes and

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sat up as Cappy and the girl stooped through the entrance to the shed. The pilot's expression made it clear that, whatever he had told the girl, he had hoped there would be no one there, but he rallied and said, "Ah, Anyushka, you must learn to trust me. Here is old friend to see you, Danny."

Dalehouse accepted the formal handshake she offered. She had a nice smile, he observed. In fact, if she had not chosen to wear her hair pulled severely back and avoid the use of makeup she could have been quite attractive. "I was hoping to get a chance to talk to you, Miss Dimitrova."

"Heavens, Ana, please. Old cell-mates must not be formal with each other."

"But on the other hand," said the pilot, "must not impose on dear Danny, who is no doubt hungry and must get to mess-hall at once or risk missing excellent dog-meat-and-slime meal."

"Nice try, Cappy," Dalehouse acknowledged. "No, I'm not hungry. How are things on Earth, Ana? I've just been hearing some bad stories."

Her expression clouded. "If the stories you have heard have been violence and disaster, then, yes. that is how things are. Just before we left, television news spoke of martial law in the city of Los Angeles, and also in several cities of Europe. And there was some sinking of an Australian naval vessel off the coast of Peru."

"Dear God."

"Oh, there is much more than that, Dr. Dalehouse—Dan. But we have brought all the recent newspapers, as well as tapes of television programs—it is really quite an extensive library, I understand. I believe there are more than twenty thousand books in microfiche, at Colonel Menninger's express orders."

"Twenty thousand books?" Dalehouse shook his head. "You know, I never thought of her as a reader."

Ana smiled and sat cross-legged on the floor before him. "Please, let us be comfortable. I too am sometimes astonished at Colonel Menninger." She hesitated, then said, "She is not, however, always to be relied on. I had expected some time to consult with my government before coming here, on her promise. But it did not happen. None of us were allowed to leave the camp until we were flown to the launching point. Perhaps it was because she did not want to risk exposing us to the unstable conditions we might have found."

"As bad as that?"

"Worse," growled Kappelyushnikov. "You see, Danny? We should be grateful to be here on safe—tropical-paradise planet like Jem, where only once in a while isolated party gets wiped out by giant cockroaches."

"That's another thing," said Danny. "Marge Menninger doesn't seem particularly worried, after the flap yesterday."

"No reason to worry, dear Danny. I and little Vietnamese colonel have scoured every centimeter from ten klicks in all directions, using magnetometer, I-R scanners and good piloting eyes. Is no metal thing bigger than breadbasket any-

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where around, I promise, and not more than three, maybe six, creatures larger than crab-rat. So sleep safely tonight, Danny. In own bed," he added pointedly, and did not need to add "soon."

Nan was quicker than he. "That is good advice, Cappy," she said, standing up. "I think I will take it for myself."

"I will escort you," rumbled Kappelyushnikov. "No, do not disturb self, Danny, I see you are quite tired."

Ana sighed. "Gospodin Kappelyushnikov," she scolded, "apart from the fact that I am tired and quite disoriented from all these new experiences, you and I have barely met. I do hope that we will be friends. Please don't make that difficult by behaving like some Cossack with a peasant maid."

Cappy looked abashed, then angry. Then he grinned. "Anyushka, you are fine Slavic girl. Yes, we will be friends at once. Later on, perhaps more—but," he added hastily, "only in proper Soviet style, no premature touching, all right? Now let us all three stroll through pleasant Jemman murk to your tent."

Ana laughed and slapped him on the shoulder. "Russian bear! Come, then." She led the way outside and stood for a moment, glancing around at the quieting camp. The floodlights that marked official "day" were out, but Kung was clear and ruddy in the sky overhead. "I do not know if I can get used to a world where it is never night," she complained.

"Is severe handicap for certain purposes, yes," Kappelyushikov agreed. They climbed the bluff and walked along it toward the female tent area. At the very edge, surrounded by a border of rounded stones in lieu of a lawn, was a larger tent then the others. It already had a flat rock before it stenciled *Col. M. Menninger, Commanding*.

"Margie's doing herself well," Dalehouse commented.

"Is privilege of rank," said Kappelyushnikov, but he was staring down the beach at the four new ships, one tall and slim, three squat, resting on their landing struts.

"That's strange, isn't it?" Dalehouse said. "Those three are quite unlike the others."

Cappy glanced at him. "You are truly observant, Danny." But his tone was strange.

"All right, Cappy. What's the secret?"

"Secret? Simple pilot is not told secrets. But I have eyes, and I can make conjectures."

"Come on, Cappy. You're going to tell us your conjecture sooner or later, why not do it now?"

"Two conjectures," he corrected. "First, observe shape of three new spacecraft. Imagine sliced in half, forming two little cones each. Then imagine all six cones set on base around perimeter of camp and those long, narrow ports that are so unnecessary for navigation of space removed. What have we then?"

"Upside-down cones with long narrow parts," Dalehouse guessed.

"Yes, exactly. Only when installed on defense perimeter we have other name for them. We call them 'machine-gun emplacements.'" He sighed. "I think is

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triumph of two-faced engineering design, not accident, that this is so."

"But one can scarcely believe that," objected Ana. "This is, after all, a peaceable exploration party, not an invading army!"

"Yes, also exactly. Is only coincidence that so many members of peaceable exploration party are also soldiers."

Both Dalehouse and the girl were silent, studying the landed spaceships. "I would like not to believe you," said Ana at last. "But perhaps—"

"Wait a minute!" Dalehouse interrupted. "Those three ships—they don't have any return stage! That's why they're so short!"

Kappelyushnikov nodded. "And that is second conjecture," he added heavily. "Only is not really conjecture. Library of twenty thousand books is not light reading for weekend. Space-craft that come apart to make forts are not for round trip. Vessels without return capsule capability are not accident. Total of sum is clear. For many of us, is not intended we ever go back to dear old planet Earth."

★

Getting into the Jemman sky again the next day was a victory for Dalehouse, and he did not know how many more of those victories he would have. The day had begun unpromisingly. As soon as the "morning" lights were on he found a mini-memo on the bench inside his tent door to let him know that, as from 0800 hours that standard day, he was to consider himself under military discipline with the assimilated rank of captain. On the way to breakfast he had passed an orderly carrying two covered trays into Margie's tent. An orderly! Not even the late Harriet Santori had gone that far. And on the way back past the tent, the Vietnamese colonel had been coming out.

Who Marge Menninger kept in her bed was no concern of his, and all this other military Mickey-Mouse was irrelevant to his purpose on Jem. All the same, Dalehouse was not enjoying his flight as much as usual that day.

For one thing, Charlie and his flock were nowhere around—partly because Major Santangelo had insisted they overfly some of the other parts of Jem to bring back intelligence. Mostly because Dalehouse himself was reluctant to have them there, with so many ha'aye'i waiting in the clouds to prey on them. At least he had insisted they stay a full two kilometers away from the Greasy camp; maybe that was enough for safety. Meanwhile, Dalehouse had his lightweight carbine with him, and he was hoping to take out at least a couple of the ha'aye'i before Charlie drifted back. There was already one balloonist in the camp as a sort of combination convalescent and pet, waiting for his ha'aye'i-ripped gasbag to mend enough for flight. Dalehouse didn't want Charlie to join him.

Trying to look appetizing, he drifted under the base of a low cumulus-humilis. It was exactly the sort of place the air-sharks chose for hiding. But if there was one in the cloud it wasn't hungry just then.

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He vented gas and dropped away from the cloud as the updraft began to suck him toward it; if there were ha'aye'i, he wanted to meet them in clear air, not where they could be upon him before he could shoot. A return flow carried him back toward the camp, and he looked down from half a kilometer on a busy scene. About twenty people were still unloading the new ships. Others were clearing brush and forest to widen the perimeter around the camp, and up past the camp, toward the hills, in a natural meadow of thorn-bearing ground vines, a tiny tractor was plowing furrows. That was new! The tractor must have come out of one of the ships, and the furrows looked exactly as though someone was planning to farm.

That was reasonable enough, and even good news—certainly they could use fresh vegetables, and if the Greasies could grow them so could the Fats. But something about it troubled Dalehouse. He couldn't put his finger on it; something about using soldiers to farm? Forced labor on land?

He dismissed the thought; he was getting too low.

He vented some ballast, and the water sluiced down on the newly plowed land like a toy-scaled rain shower. The thing that was tickling his memory was beginning to be annoying. For some reason, it reminded him of his undergraduate anthropology professor, a gentle and undemanding man a lot like Alex Woodring—

Like Alex Woodring, who was dead. Along with Gasha and the Bulgarian corporal he had never really come to know.

He was having nothing but depressing thoughts. His reserves of hydrogen and ballast were getting a little low, and evidently the ha'aye'i had learned to distinguish between a balloonist and a human being swinging from a netted cluster of bags. They were not tricked this day. Reluctantly he swung back over the beach, vented gas and dropped to the pebbly sand.

By the time he had picked up and stowed the deflated balloons, Margie Menninger was approaching, along with the woman sergeant who was her orderly. "Nice flying, Danny," she said. "Looks like fun. Will you take me up with you sometime?"

He stood regarding her for a moment. She really looked very pretty, even in the maroon Kung-light that darkened her lips and hid the gold of her hair. Her fatigues were new and sharply pressed and her short hair-do flopped becomingly as she moved. "Any time you say, Marge. Or is it 'colonel'?"

She laughed. "All you brand-new officers are the same, very rank conscious. We're off duty right now, Danny, so it's Marge. You'll learn."

"I'm not sure I want to learn how to be a soldier."

"Oh, you'll catch on," she promised. "Tinka, take the point. Let's go for a walk, shall we?"

The sergeant moved out ahead of them, trotting to the barbed-wire enclosure. The troops in the pit at the corner lifted a section of the wire aside so the three of them could pass through; the sergeant in charge gave Margie a soft salute and she nodded pleasantly back. "If

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a person went swimming in this water," she said, "would she find herself being eaten up by something?"

"Not so far. We do it all the time."

"Looks pretty tempting. Care to join me.?"

Dalehouse shook his head, not in negation but in wonder. "'Margie, you're something. I thought colonels had to keep busy, especially when they think their troops need armed guards and barbed-wire fences day and night."

"Dear Danny," she said goodnaturedly, "I haven't been a colonel very long, but I taught the Theory of it to a couple thousand plebes at the Point. I think I have a pretty good grasp of the basic principles. A colonel doesn't have to do much, she just has to see that everybody else gets everything done. I already put in four hours of pretty solid work this morning."

"Yes, I saw Colonel Tree coming out of your tent."

She looked at him thoughtfully. She didn't comment, but went on, "As to your other point, the perimeter watch is s.o.p. from now on, but there are patrols in the woods, and aerial reconnaissance every hour, and besides, Tinka's a qualified expert with all hand weapons. I think you'll be all right."

"I wasn't worried about my personal safety."

"No, you weren't. You were worried about the troops under my command, and on their behalf I thank you for your concern." She grinned and patted his arm. "Hold on a minute." She fished a cigarette case out of her pocket, ducked behind him to get out of the wind and expertly lit up. She inhaled deeply and held it, passing him the joint. When she exhaled, she called to the sergeant, "Tinka!"

"Yes'm."

"Next batch of dope you clean for us, save the seeds. Let's see if we can grow the little buggers here."

"Yes'm."

Danny took a long hit, beginning to relax. Being with Margie Menninger was never dull, at least. As he slowly exhaled he looked over in some admiration. She had adjusted at once to the heat; the disconcertingly low gravity, the thick air that had troubled them all for weeks. She was some kind of woman.

By the time they had finished passing the joint back and forth, they were out of sight of the perimeter guard, where the beach widened under a high, bare bluff. Margie stopped, looking around. "Seems as good as any," she commented. "Tinka, take your position."

"Yes'm." The sergeant scrambled agilely up the side of the bluff to the top and Margie shucked her fatigues. She wore nothing underneath. "If you're coming, come. If not, stay and help Tinka keep watch." And she splashed into the water.

Dope, company or whatever, Dalehouse was feeling better than he had all day. He laughed out loud, then skinned out of his own clothes and joined her.

To be continued

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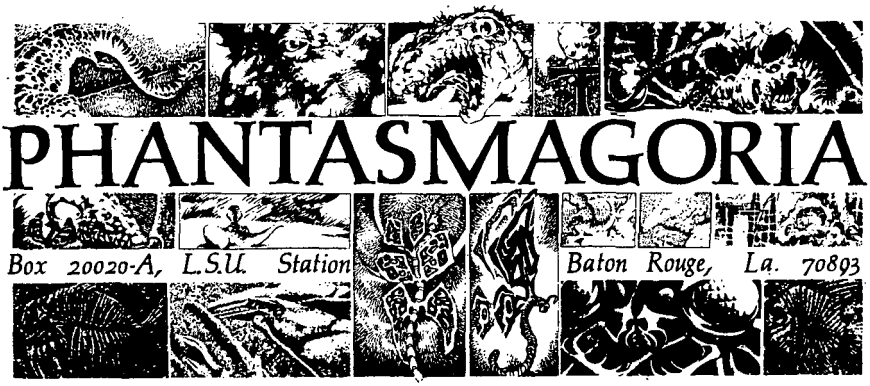

Since 1970 Phantasmagoria has published 5 magazines and 18 portfolios of exquisitely rendered art by Kenneth Smith. Virtually all of these publications have set a new high-water-mark for quality of contents and of reproduction: years before fandom knew what limited-edition/prime-quality publications were, Phantasmagoria was already devoted to just such standards of excellence. It remains the only such publishing venture in which the entire process of reproduction is overseen, and its quality guaranteed, by the artist himself. Owning a Phantasmagoria reproduction is virtually as good as owning an original.

The latest PHANTASMAGORIA Magazine, #5, contains a lavish fable from the Age of Insects. The cover and centerfold are gorgeous color-process. Still available at $7 each, this issue is the peak of Phantasmagoria's efforts to create intelligent fantasy, meticulously rendered. Put some depth into your fantasy life with this connoisseur's delight, the aristocrat of limited-editions. Don't delay—the first two issues of the magazine are nearly out of print now. (If you desire your copy autographed and inscribed to you, please include an extra $1.)

Outstanding among Phantasmagoria's line of fine-art fantasy prints, PORTFOLIO 13 contains 10 superbly rendered and printed plates of fantastic nudes. Two plates are full color-process, one is 3-color, two are duotones, and five are printed in a single, specially-mixed tint—all in rich depths of ink on the finest coated Warren stock, size 11x14 inches. Like most of Phantasmagoria's portfolios, #13 is an extremely limited edition of 500 sets: this portfolio is signed and numbered by the artist, $25. (All portfolios and magazines are mailed with protective cardboard.)

The work of Kenneth Smith has been featured recently in a Ballantine/Ariel art book, SORCERERS, and soon may appear in a collection of his own best work. He is currently contributing covers to GALAXY and Ace. If you wish to see the full line of Phantasmagoria publications illustrated and described, please send $1 for a 16-page brochure (with information also about lithographs and originals). For an additional $1, your name will be added to our mailing list for special announcements in the future.

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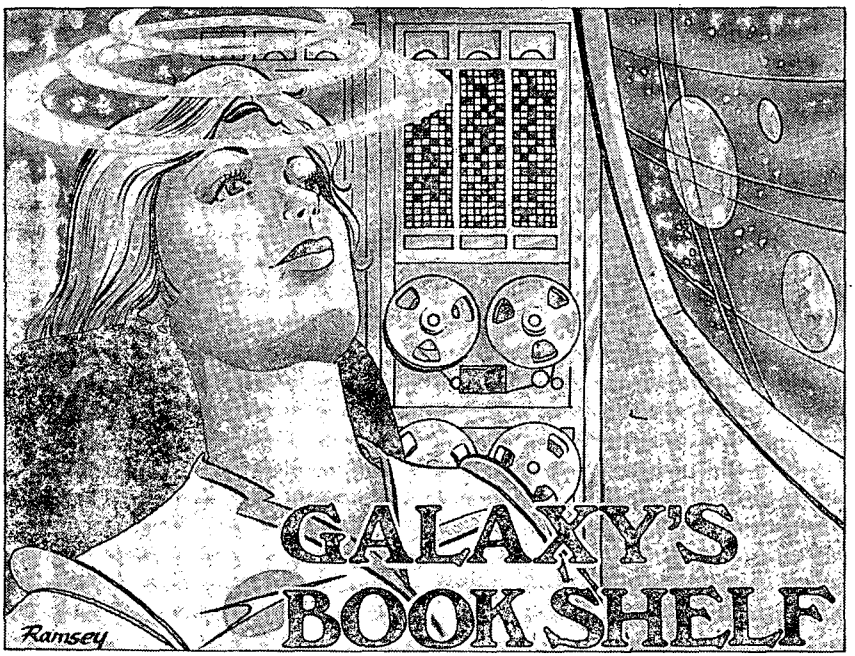

And Having Writ by Donald R. Benson. Bobbs-Merrill, $8.95.

Don Benson has been an editor for a long time. In spite of that he writes well, and shows a kindhearted soul in this alternate–Earth novel.

An alien explorer spaceship, *the Wanderer*, enters Earth's atmosphere too fast and seems certain to explode. As a last resort, one of the human-like crew activates a Probability Displacer and the ship enters an alternate time-stream in which the ship enters the atmosphere safely, though crippled.

They enter an Earth time-frame of the early 1900's and are faced with the problem of either stimulating this Earth's science enough to make possible complicated repairs to their spacer, or of being marooned.

Benson has fun with their encounters with Teddy Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Thomas Edison; the Kaiser, the Czar. . . . This Earth's alternate history becomes skewed in unexpected ways by the aliens' "interference" and good-intentions.

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This is a pleasant book, a mild sf adventure, written with good humor and competence.

Heat by Arthur Herzog Signet, $1.95

I didn't think much of his previous novel, *The Swarm*, but in this one Herzog caught me and held me—sometimes against my will. He had sense enough to keep the personal problems and the man-woman romance in the background. The overpowering interest is in the gathering but uncertain evidence that excess CO_2 in the atmosphere is no longer being absorbed by the oceans. In fact, in the tropical Atlantic the ocean is giving it back.

First the weather goes crazy. Then the heat. . . .

There is a terrible danger that a runaway greenhouse effect will be started and that Earth may end up like Venus. Humanity is on the verge of doom.

The novel spends almost all its time in the build-up. The actual consequences—heat—and saving mankind from the oven are raced through in the final twenty pages.

I suspect the book was structured and aimed for the movies. That's good commercial sense, but it warps the novel.

Dawn Of The Dead by George Romers and Susanna Sparrow, St. Martin's, $7.95.

You have to be terminally credulous to get past the 'living dead' premise of this horror novel. But if you can lock up your disbelief for a few hours, this novelization of a forthcoming major horror film (sequel to *Night Of The Living Dead* . . . a so-called classic) will keep you turning pages avidly.

On the other hand, if the concept of the recent dead coming "alive" to attack and eat the living and their own warm dead for food, and the ruthless killing by the living of these zombies is a turn-off, don't go near this book—or the movie.

If the book is an accurate reflection of the film, the movie will be the bloodiest, most sickening ever made.

These zombies are permanently killed by shooting them in the brain, or otherwise disconnecting the brain from the body . . . decapitation, smashing. . . .

No credible explanation is given for the sudden reanimation of hundreds, then thousands, then millions of the newly dead. They can take any kind of damage to the body and still keep coming (or try to come). Yet they make sounds—a moaning cry, and they breath and bleed, which means their hearts must beat to keep the brain going. . . . So why wouldn't a stopped heart kill them? Why wouldn't they bleed to death?

No explanation. This is run-run-shoot-shoot-run-fear-scream-Arrrrrggggh! with no rationality. The three men and women we follow through this book are almost all given to stupidity and panic so that the authors can menace them again and again with the zombies.

The novel sucks. But in its way it *is* exciting and gripping.

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Star Rigger's Way by Jeffrey A. Carver Dell, $1.75

The wonder of this book—a novel of character-change, maturation, abandonment of illusions and discovering-of-self—is the hyper-space drive that is called the Net and which is powered somehow by spaceship generators. In order to travel in the Flux—the hyperspace continuum—the ship's pilots, called Riggers, must control the net with their minds—working as a team—and guide the ship through the dangers of hyperspace.

The problem is that their minds impose (necessarily) an understandable vision of what is going on around them. They can appear to be sailing through an ocean . . . a snowstorm . . . a dangerous cavern . . . a seething, vari-colored mist. . . . a serene forest . . . a deadly, rocky labyrinth . . . . and they can be wrong.

Riggers are *different* people, blessed and cursed with a peculiar psi talent that permits them to pilot ships in this manner. It is dangerous, exciting work.

The novel begins when Gev Carlyle, a young Rigger, finds himself alone on a space frighter, accidentally alive after an unexplained disaster in the Flux killed the three other Riggers who were flying the ship at the time.

He has almost no chance of making it to safety, since he hasn't the mind-power to pilot the huge ship.

Then he picks up a distress beacon and is able to rescue an alien catlike creature—a Cephean—who is able to help fly the ship but who is self-destructive, a victim of his cultural conditioning.

Yet Gev manages to link minds with the being and attempt to fly the deadly Flume—the only way to safety.

Gev is haunted by his desire to reunite with three companions/Riggers whom he loved. The book is his fight to trace them and bring them together again—to recreate his "family."

As he pursues his goal he becomes a different person, grows, matures . . . and doesn't realize it until a final crisis forces. . . .

I had trouble with the "subjective sea" of the Flux and the ability of the mind to fly huge spaceships in this psi-powered hyperspace. But what-thehell, it's an engaging science fantasy and the novel will leave you saying to yourself, "Yeah!"

Trample Down An Empire by Mack Reynolds Leisure Books, $1.50

Three men, bored, living off Guaranteed Annual Income, as a joke and as a way to get some extra money, start the Subversive Party . . . a mockery of the existing Republican-Democrat Party which controls the country.

To their delight and astonishment the movement takes hold in an equally bored, quietly desperate U.S.A. and soon mushrooms to the point that their outrageous party principles—make everything legal (except *real* crime), really clean up the air, the food, the water, maximize freedom while also abolishing the constitution, elections, etc. A truly revolutionary program. The core of the party's appeal is selfishness . . . legitimized selfishness.

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To this end they require payments for joining, require recruitment of two others, then five others for privileged status in the party. . . . They get kick-backs and high profit from party uniforms, badges, etc.

The International Bureau of Investigation, of course, plants spies and agents in the party, but somehow things don't work out right for the Establishment-in-power. Drastic measures are called for. . . .

This is a humorously cynical look at American politics and contemporary American society. Some of the ideas advocated by the characters are Not Nice. They Disturb. They (even in mockery) make one squirm.

The book doesn't really end; it stops. But even so, it makes me wonder if the unconventional content of this novel led to its rejection by Mack's regular publishers, Ace and Bantam . . . and other major publishers. All the major publishers today are owned by companies which are owned by companies which are owned by the biggest of the big corporations.

The Art Of The Fantastic, Edited by Gerry de la Ree
7 Cedarwood Lane, Saddle River, NJ. 07458

This is an anthology of art from the extensive personal collection of de la Ree, a fan of long standing who issues these handsome, large, beautifully printed hardcover volumes several times a year. Usually he publishes books devoted to one artist—Finlay, Fabian, Bok, Cartier . . .

This volume contains work by Hannes Bok, Virgil Finlay, Lawrence Stevens, Edd Cartier, Stephen Fabian, Frank R. Paul, Mahlon Blaine, Frank Kelly Freas, Charlie McGill, Clark Ashton Smith, Tim Kirk, Harry Clarke, Ed Emsh, George Barr, Roy Krenkel, and others. All the plates in this book are black and white. Color reproduction of the paintings in Gerry's collection would be prohibitive, especially for a limited edition of 1200 copies such as this.

Most of the drawings in this book are illustrations for stories and novels. You'll probably recognize some of them.

The varieties of styles and techniques is entrancing to me. The more you know about art and the discipline of rendering in black and white—ink, pencil, etc., the more you appreciate the skills and talents of the men here honored.

—RICHARD E. GEIS

★ ★ ★

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WHEN THE METAL EATERS CAME

David Bunch

They could live forever in their bionic metal bodies . . . if anyone can *really* live forever!

SURE, WE DIDN'T HAVE to run from hearses then or speculate on coffins. See a flesh kid dragging his playmate through the streets and pounding him down with a bat, we didn't care. So who's to die and what's to go? Not us, we thought. Let all flesh-land fall on stones and cut its noses on razors—good riddance! We'd just pump up and down on our all-weather new-metal knee joints, push the phfluggee-phflaggee button on our talkers at them each and everyone and laugh and laugh. And anytime we wanted to, we could pull back over the line into Our Country, sit in our hip-snuggie chairs in a Stronghold and gloat upon our buttons, Good-Gadget buttons.

And then it happened. Just when you think you've got it made, all nailed up and zippered down, the thing starts pulling loose at the hinge-joints. Take us, for instance. We'd fought to a fine standstill and a victory conclusion, we thought, the dread human idea that, soon or late, all humans had to die. I think our bold defiance of this concept and our attempted solution of the problem should rank with some of science's better things. Or at least I thought that before. But now—!

Well, what are you going to do when everything goes black, when the bright dream fades and the dark cover pulls over your guide stars? Try again? Sure! That's the human way. Be sorry you laughed when the flesh kid died in the streets? Be appalled that you just yawned when the big fat milk horse at the noon-day curb was half halved by that runaway factory wagon? Well, perhaps be sorry. But not too much time to be sorry over the mishaps of flesh-land. What's to gain by being

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sorry?

And speaking of mishaps— If you have not by this time seen someone half eaten by our new-metal all-metal metal eaters, you have missed one of the world's stark horrors. You cannot say, "I have seen deep tragedy." You have seen nothing! By comparison all other mishaps must seem but soft landings and easy fractures. Or at least it seems so to me. But then, I might be prejudging in favor of my own condition. You be the judge.

You see, we had it made in steel-topped Moderan, the country of the peotals, where metal-and-people people lounged in Stronghold homes with their Good-Gadget buttons. There is to that no reasonable doubt to have—we had it made. We'd had ourselves done over. Long ago. After that, standing around in a truce time in our new-metal alloy "replacements," our bulk like new-metal armor, our flesh-strips few and played-down, couldn't we spit at time then, couldn't we laugh it down? Our organs made up of tireless gadgetry, hearts like little engines, lungs like accordion boxes, flexi-flex new-metal bellows—couldn't we max out of a dormant whenever we chose for a spree, couldn't we push buttons and flick switches on a big-daddy go!? And food—that introven! purer than fresh mountain snow and GOOD! great for a flesh-strip feed. Oh things were fine indeed then, and no hurry in steel-topped Moderan where the plastic yard sheets covered our sterilized acres. Germless as new mountain snowballs in Old Times we had eternity! all sacked and tied and slung upon our backs like golden apples in a bag.

And then they came, low like damp dark smoke over the metal flowers, dropping in out of nowhere one spring day. Others were riding the air high up like eagles floating in Old Times. A million of them perhaps would, lumped, make a speck as big as a small-small pencil dot. Under our powerful lenses they had jaws and teeth like ocean sharks of Old Days. Just say they were the dread metal fly-fleas, strangest mutants of all time. So what's to tell? Just tell that they ate us? Oh, how portray the horror?

One moment, say, you're sitting outside the eleventh, outermost Wall of your Stronghold. It's between wars, a fine June Tuesday, and your Warner hangs dormant while the cone balls that are your ears for danger go silent round-and-round in a slow circling above your armor in this pleasant time of truce. And then the cloud flings up, small, far out, where the flower tops meet the vapor shield, grows and keeps on coming. And it hits. In an incredibly short time, under your Warner's heavy and helpless danger clangor, it lands with a small-small sound like the buzz a very fine sleet might make tack-tacking against a window. In Ancient Weather. You feel nothing, being mostly that hitherto all-protective invincible survival metal, but you see the deep black film settle, shift, go up and down and across you. You try to wipe it off. Ha. There is no method. You try to think of things. You try to pretend that nothing is happening. You sit and sing. You speculate on a Max

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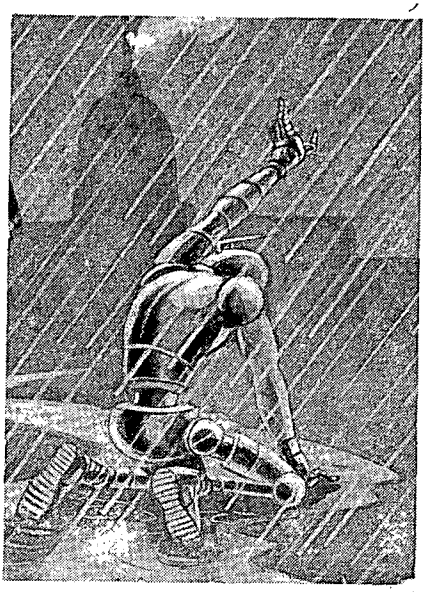
Fire to blast his threat when it's winging. Ho! Did you ever try to fell a cloud—or bring down smoke—with rifle fire? —After a while the deep black film lifts with a tiny sound, like small-small sand falling across a rock. There is a darkness in the air for a fleeting instant. You watch the darkness go. You try to sing. You try to pretend nothing has happened. But something has happened! You're smaller by a little than you had been. For you have just had your visit from the new-metal all-metal metal eaters, deadliest mutants ever known.

And all over Moderan it goes on, this thing. The dark droning clouds rage up countless times in the morning, countless times in the afternoon, sweep in upon us and chop out a metal fill. Or if it's a time of war, and we're inside tending to launcher buttons, the clouds film across our Strongholds and eat there on the roof. We or our Strongholds, it is the same, in time it is the same. Inexorably they will eat all.

And so we who once had forever, Eternity, like a bright wish tied down, feel the great thing go little by little in a black film drifting over us from time to time. And when the wings fan up of the shark-jawed atoms, loaded and going away, and we fling a pocko-scope viewer up to our wide-range mechanized eyes for a better peep at our tormentors, and see them so magnified, sometimes we think of a black drift of condors all plated with terrible scales. It is then that we know, and we see how we stand. They go away on a Joy-flight digesting a little of us on the wind each day, each day. And so we are mortal after all, to a degree



as vulnerable as any in simple flesh-land? Is it only a question of time?

But the dream! The magnificent dream lives on and feeds upon eternity—or the quest for that. It clothes its bones in hope again and comes out fighting. Perhaps it is only a minor setback after all, this of the metal "fleas." Perhaps tomorrow, some shiny-new tomorrow, we shall "replace" ourselves with the pure dream—a thing like rubber, maybe. Yes! a new-cell rubber alloy, that could be the answer. And the metal metal eaters will starve then, their vile steel bellies sucked up in terrible tiny ribs and mouths chopping hard in a foodless hopeless time. They will drift out to die, as all things shall and must that have annoyed king Man. YES! ★

by David Bunch

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LETTERS

Dear J.J.:

First, could I please comment on C. J. Cherryh's *"The Faded Sun: Kesrith"*? I thought it was a beautiful story, and sad enough in the genocide of the *mri* to make me wish for that miraculous happy ending that never came. I liked the description of the scenery, which helped me to feel there in the action; and the perceptive study of Niun's mind moved me very much because I can see threads of the same ambivalence in some of my own contradictory motivations and actions.

The thing that makes me feel a little skeptical is that I couldn't find a bridge that would make the already-hateful *regul* suddenly commit murder when it was so unlike them that they had to hire the *mri* to be mercenaries. I can understand where bai Hulagh could have gotten desperate, to where he could have broken through *some* of the conditioning (though it would have been lots harder than it was made out to be). But even so, it didn't sit too well with me. I will agree that they were impossible to sympathize with; and in their forthcoming defeat, I felt a sadistic surge of triumph as in "Now I've got you, you s.o.b.!" A beautiful and hauntingly question-filled open-ended ending. Thank you, Ms. Cherryh.

This letter is also a great chance for me to praise *Galaxy* for your enlightened attitude toward the blind SF freak. Could you please send me the names and addresses of people in my area with whom I can get in touch? Let me explain that I am a blind person, and wish that along with *Galaxy,* I could also get *Analog* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction.*

One big frustration is that the Library of Congress selectors must go to hiding-places to find some of the books that do get transcribed. There have been all too many times I've wanted to discuss a book with a sighted person, only to be told, "I didn't know that book was around." It's an interesting thing to think about, because perhaps in our own ways, we all wish we had more time, chance and whatever-else to read more than we can. So maybe there isn't all that much difference in our situations except for its being a matter of degree. I want to thank you, *Galaxy,* for helping to bridge the gap.

Two books I'd like to talk about briefly, as examples of ones I've read and others haven't, are Jacqueline Lichtenberg's first novel, and a book I'm just as glad that not many of you have *had* to suffer through. Have some others read these, and could I have some feedback?

John Guenther's novel, *The God Machine,* was so bad I made myself read through the whole thing long after I knew it couldn't get any better. It was a shame, because some of his ideas about the Micronizer were interesting and seemed original to me, and to some extent, I really enjoyed the banter and humor among the characters. But in general, it was really strange for a lot of reasons. If

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he can publish and even get his book done in an alternative reading medium, there may be hopes for *my* future as a writer, despite my misgivings about whether I know enough.

Basically, it's a story about what happens in the relatively-near future when a Stereotypical-Sixties-type movement called the Amorphous goes underground to try to fight and break the influence of a totalitarian, inhumane government. The main protagonists in the novel are Professor Welch (there never was a first name for him—just Welch), and his wife Eve (who was never called Mrs. Welch). One of the ground rules for entering an Amorphous to pool your talents with other dissidents is to have been a victim of the System. Well, he is one, and a lot goes on, with pages used to describe how the explosion blew people apart in different ways. Some of the names in the book were so obviously cutesy that it was hilarious; example, DeCorum, an ex-student of Welch's who worked for the government and got his long feared what-for as a result. Of the two societies, there was more potential for love and real warmth among those in the Amorphous; but generally, if that's what society is evolving toward, I want to do all I can to change it from happening. What did it reflect, the sickness of society or that of the writer? It was a sad mis-application of a good talent, and let's hope he does better next time—if there *is* a next time.

Jacqueline Lichtenberg's novel. *House of Zeor,* is a novel of another kind. The descriptions were beautiful, and the situation, though potentially disastrous, had plenty of room for hope. There was a lot of adaptability and heroism in the characters that left me feeling proud that I'm a human being, and what made it so stirring is that this sort of thing *could* happen. It was not written in a too-good-to-be-true way, either; you couldn't help chuckling over different arguments caused by different cultural values. It is set in a post-nuclear-holocaust future where humanity, though mutation, splits into two unstable but evolving factions. Simes and Gens have to live together; but Simes, who have special powers and vulnerabilities, must also prey upon Gens for survival, as that is the only source of *selyn* energy, which they will die without. It is a very sensitive book. Read and enjoy.

This leads to my last question. I wonder if there could be an article in *Galaxy* sometime for beginning SF writers, with some tips on how to write but mostly about how the beginer may get started in vying for publication. Along with it, could you give us your policies as they pertain to an aspiring writer? (That's what caught my attention; you are using new writers and giving them a chance to express themselves through your pages. That's more encouraging to people like me.)

Peggy Walsh
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(You can see the flaws in a plot as well as anybody—HS) (Peggy's record reviews will appear in future issues—KH)

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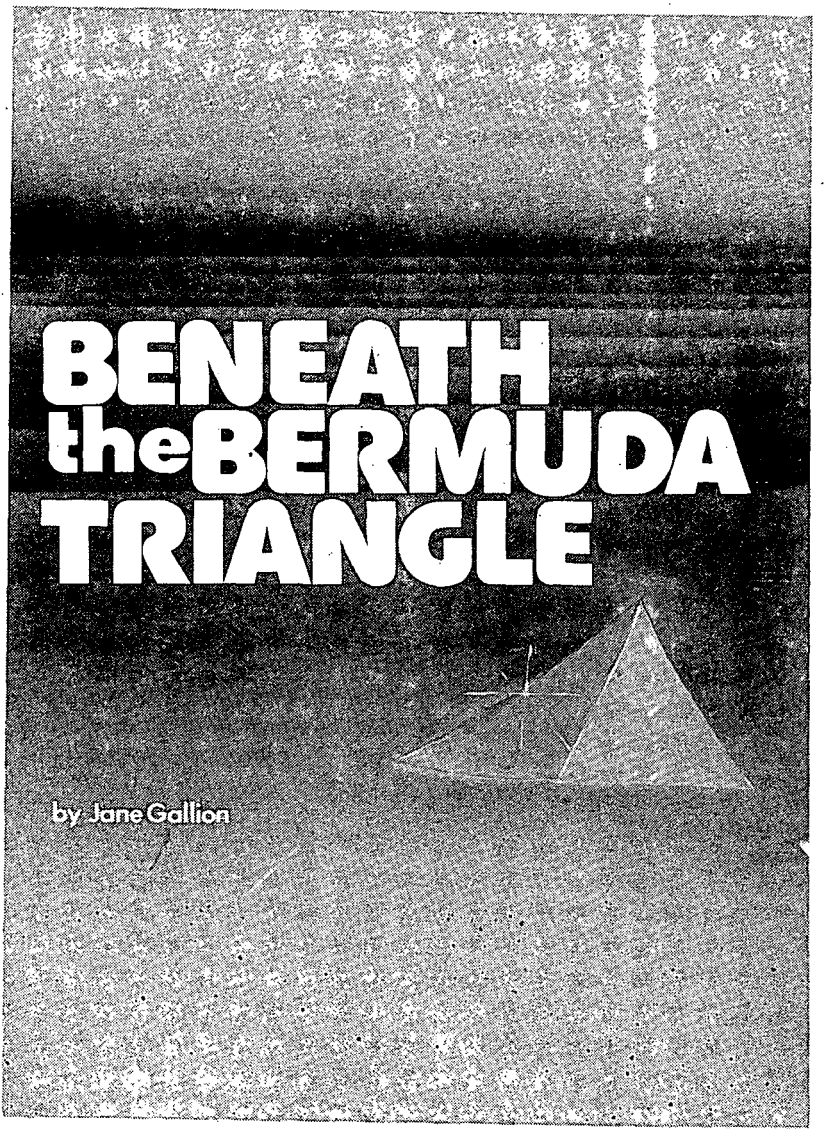

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BENEATH THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE

by
Jane Gallion

To: Apollo

A GALAXY NOVEL
NEW YORK
1979

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"DO YOU WAN SOMETHEEN more?" the waitress asked.

Dave Connell looked up from his empty glass. He brushed a few crumbs from the tabletop, looked at his watch, and then at the door. Someone was entering, but it was only another party of tourists. The dark-haired hostess greeted them and led them to a candlelit table in another corner of *la trapaza tùrista*. Nine-eighteen p.m., and no Bonnie. He sighed, and slumped back in his chair. "Mas cerveza," he said, and pushed his glass to the edge of the table.

"Ahnd thee esenorita?"

"What?"

"Thee ladee, senor. Perhaps she would like sometheen more?" the waitress said. "Perhaps jew both would wish to hahve sometheen to eat?"

Dave blinked. Distractedly, he imagined that she sounded suspicious, as though she knew that their presence here was not mere tourism. "To . . . ah . . . eat?" he temporized.

Oh, he was being ridiculous. This was a restaurant, and they were probably taking up valuable time and room with their waiting and fiddling. But to eat? When his stomach was in knots, and the succession of beers he had drunk to kill the intolerable waiting time was making him even more jittery. "Well . . ." He glanced aside at Sara, holding a half-drunk brandy and soda. He had hardly spoken to her since the first one. Her expression was pleading; it was the one she wore rather than speak out and ask him for something, and he knew she was probably hungry. "Yes . . . yes. I think we would like to eat; uh, *por favor*. Can we see a menu?"

Of course Sara was hungry. They had been waiting here in this too-warm room for over two hours. And they had not eaten since breakfast in that airport clip-joint in Los Angeles early this morning, unless you counted a ham and cheese on rye, wolfed down in flight somewhere over the top end of Louisiana, with the jungly miles of the Deep South unrolling with hypnotic sameness beneath them as they flew steadily toward Miami.

Where was the damn woman anyway? What was taking her so long? *Something had gone wrong—he knew it had.*

The latin waitress, a tiny girl with huge, luminous eyes, and a frothy emulsion of lace ruffles at the bosom, smiled falsely and brilliantly at them before taking Dave's empty glass and turning briskly on a spiked heel to bring them menus.

Her too-short skirt reminded Dave that he was in a foreign country, where styles lagged ten years behind American hip, recalling unavoidably the Sara he had met and almost instantly loved when every trim behind in the country had been clad in them. Sara's had been skirted in the in-est of black vinyl, topped with a muslin peon shirt that this little waitress wouldn't be caught dead in even now. Sara had worn high vinyl boots with her outfit, no lipstick, and heavy earrings like stained glass in her ears, the only color about her, barring the green glow of her eyes under the swing of ironed hair and rumpled bangs. But you had to count her eyes, the eyes of

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a shakti of Kama, full of pure and primordial energy. Those eyes had captured him from across the El Monte Legion Stadium, strobes going, band wailing, and kept him on his feet as he struggled to get to her in sections, stoned into near-oblivion, but brought back by the sudden reality of a green-eyed she-god on the other side of a crowd of dancing freaks. Looking across the beer-ringed foreign table at her now, he could believe that this was a different woman.

She met his eyes, no green fire in hers now, which were still, eternally, entreating after these hours of tension. "Worried?" she asked, her voice high-pitched with her own worry that she wouldn't claim, but only lay on him.

Dave made an impatient gesture. "Of course I'm worried. The goddam woman has been gone over two hours, and I've sat here and drunk . . . I forgot how many beers . . . trying to believe she hasn't been killed or mugged. Or arrested. Or skipped out, though why she'd do that when she can get rid of the stuff in five minutes flat in Miami, *she said,* I'll be goddamned if I know. Or she could have been hit by a car and be lying in some hospital somewhere. Or in a morgue . . ."

"Dave . . ."

"Dave, don't worry!" he growled. "Ah, don't be ridiculous, Sara. Of course I'm worried." At her stricken look, he felt immediately guilty. He put out a hand to cover her pale fingers. He touched her wedding ring, worn long enough to be largely smooth now, though when he had put it on her finger it had been carved with tiny lotuses. He had got it for her from Sikkim. Put it on her finger when they had lived together long enough to get used to the idea. His goddess, with whom he had shared the mysteries of the universe. His wife, with whom he had made a child, destined to be something cosmic, and now just ashes in an urn.

Would it all have been different if Danny had lived? Would this made-up, anxious-eyed woman have stayed his Sara if the boy had made it? Did anything make any damn difference? It had made no difference to her, believing that the drugs they had taken together had killed Danny.

He sighed. "Honey, I'm sorry," he told her, struggling for just the right amount of contrition to wipe the wounded look off her face. "I'm just . . . uptight." He forced his face to smile. "Do you want to dance?" he asked, waving a hand toward the tiny dance floor where the turistas and their wives were waving their tails in grotesque imitations of a samba.

Sara grimaced and pulled back her cold hand. "No. I just don't feel like it."

He shrugged. "Suit yourself."

"If I'd suited myself, we wouldn't be here," she said. She fumbled for her purse and took out a cigarette, leaning forward for him to light it.

Anger flared in him. He said tightly, "I suppose it was all my idea. I wanted a second car. I decided we could afford a Visa card. I made the arrangements for a professional landscape artist to come and dig up the back yard. I—"

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"Well, you did," she told him accusingly, lighting her own cigarette with the tabletop candle. "I didn't say anything, I thought you wanted it. And I wanted you to be happy, to have something you liked to make up for—." She bit off her words as though she hadn't already said them often enough to brand them into his brain.

Dave flung himself away from the table. "Oh, for the love of god, will you stop it? Whatever you thought, get it through your head that nothing, but nothing's going to make up to me for Danny. No toys, nor gimmicks, nor greenhouse posies. Nothing!"

"I know that. And nothing's going to take away the guilt you—"

Dave brought his fist down on the table with a slam that rattled the candleholder against the salt and pepper. The other diners looked around curiously, and they heard someone three tables away say to his companion, "—people who don't know how to act in public. And Americans, too—"

Sara jumped, dropping her cigarette. Her eyes were weary and her voice typically patient as she said, "Dave, you're making a scene. People are looking at us. Calm down, won't you? And let's drop the subject. You never will admit—"

"No, I won't," Dave raged in a whisper, leaning across the table. "And neither will you. I won't go into this here. It's old business, prehistoric. What's right here and now is that we're here, and we're doing what we're doing. And in awhile, I hope, Bonnie will be back with her stuff and we can get the hell out of this tourist heaven and go back to Glendale where we can sit in our paid-for house and look at our landscaping, and then maybe go out for a drink we don't have to count nickels for. So let's just don't argue about it. Or about anything. Let's get something to eat." He caught sight of the little waitress stilting toward them on high heels. "Maybe I'm a little too drunk to make sense anyway," he conceded, grudgingly.

Sara sniffed. She wiped her eyes with the cocktail napkin. "You are too drunk. You've had seven beers while we've been waiting for that woman. And you've hardly said a word to me all the time we've been here. I wish I'd stayed home."

"My god, so do I," he muttered, but she had taken out her makeup and was repairing her face, and didn't hear him.

The waitress approached, laid menus before them, set Dave's beer on the table. He took a swallow and picked up the menu, seeing Sara lift hers, open it, and put a finger to her lower lip as he had known she would do. It had been part of her charm—the grand decision of what to eat when the hungries had driven them out of their bare-cupboarded cubicle into the rush and siren-scream of the midnight city, searching for munchies. But this Sara didn't lift green eyes full of excitement and lean close, whispering, "There's nothing fit to eat in here. Let's get a package of baloney and go home and go back to bed."

This one said, "I guess I'm not very hungry," and closed the menu with a long-suffering sigh. "Whatever you decide is alright with me."

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Yeah. And he would order some damn thing, and she would peck at it like a pullet, look at him with those damning eyes and tell him, better than words ever could, how he had failed her, failed at everything. And that this was a failure too.

He took another gulp of his beer. When would Bonnie get back with her merchandise so they could get out of here? When would she show up, carrying the Argentinian emeralds that Dave had agreed to help her smuggle into the States? When would she come, so they could make their connection in Miami and Dave collect his price—everybody had one—so he could go back to his bungalow in Glendale and pay off every-damn-body and—

And what?

He didn't know.

Have fun? Buy things? Go places? What do you do when the lights go out?

Rape the world?

Sara eased the too-tight band of her bra under the tailored jacket, pushed back the curl of her hair and tucked it behind her ear. He saw her lips tremble, set, and he could predict she was going to say, "Dave, I understand that you're worried, and I'm sorry I upset you."

He glanced meaningfully at the waitress. "Just forget it," he said. He wished to god that she would, if only for a moment, be his Sara, the old Sara, able to join him in this venture like she'd done in the old days. Able to do it spontaneously, without all this heavy significance. But everything was the same now—full of crunching, grinding, pointless responsibility and meaning.

He picked a dish from the menu at random, ordered two, and the waitress left.

As she went, a disturbance at the door again caught his attention. A loud anglo in a shirt to match was calling the hostess "moo-cha-cha" and complimenting her on the weather like she'd ordered it. It wasn't like this in Duluth, he boomed, it was awfully pretty down here, and he and Mother—obviously the plump wife-creature he had firmly by the elbow—were getting quite a tan from the nice Cuban sun. And they'd have been in to dinner earlier, only they'd been Christmas shopping.

Dave was turning in disgust back to his beer when the woman dropped one of her packages, and in retrieving it, the man's eye fell on Dave and Sara.

"Why, Mother, there's some Americans. Let's go sit with them."

The hostess made a vague try at sidetracking them, but lost the battle with the determined old man, her face plainly showing that there was no arguing with *turistas*. He reattached himself to his wife's elbow and steered her, packages in hand, toward their table. Oh god, not this, Dave thought, shrinking. Sara stared at the couple dully.

They couldn't be allowed to sit here. Heart hammering, Dave said, "Sorry, but we're waiting for someone. We'd like to invite you, but—"

But Sara was already back in Glendale, speaking the sort of stuff you

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said to people you'd never seen before, and wouldn't really care if you never saw again.

"—so nice to see someone from the States. Yes, it's lovely weather, so warm for Christmas."

The man seated his doughy wife tenderly. He stowed the packages on an empty chair he'd requisitioned from the next table, where a trio of Cubanos, deep in the throes of some business deal over dark rum, produced a flood of liquid courtesies that even sounded genuine. They offered a second chair, and fell all over themselves with offers of help. Their courtesy made Dave feel like a registered crud, and his attempts at a polite brushoff sound like the worst possible kind of manners.

"Steptoe's the name," the man was saying. He stuck out a hand, and Dave reluctantly shook it, pressed the be-ringed hand of his wife. "I was just telling Mother that Americans oughten't to be alone in a foreign country at Christmastime. Wasn't I, Mother? Not that I got anything against foreigners, seen-yores . . ." he nodded to the Cubans, "but you ought to be with some of your own at Christmas, I always say. Mother and I are from Duluth," he said.

"Glendale, California," Dave said without thinking.

The woman beamed. "Isn't that nice? So much sunshine. But that smog is bad for you, I hear."

Sara agreed, in the way she'd learned to agree with everything. She told the couple their names, just like they hadn't decided to be completely anonymous. He put in loudly, "We're, uh, on a little vacation." He jerked his head toward the woman's packages. "Doing some Christmas shopping."

"Isn't that nice?" Mother said warmly. "For the children?"

Damn the woman!

"No," Sara said bleakly. "Our son died last year."

"I'm so sorry," the woman said, and her hand stole out to take her husband's.

Dave glanced at Sara, saw that her eyes were shiny with tears. He hoped desperately that she wasn't going to cry in front of these strangers. Why couldn't she have stayed home instead of coming along, wrapping herself around him like a noose. He could have brushed off these home-folks and waited it out by himself.

"—fishing?" the man was saying heartily, obviously trying to change the subject. Dave wished they would just go away and let them alone.

"No," he said flatly, hoping his rudeness would discourage discussion. But a moment's silence discomfited him. "We're flying back tonight," he heard himself say. "By way of Galveston," he added quickly. "Aren't we, dear?"

"Just as well you are going that way," Mr. Steptoe said. "Safer."

"Safer?" Sara asked. Her face was pale, and Dave could see that she was frightened again. Damn the man. What was he talking about?

"No, Father . . ." Mother put in.

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"Oh, now," Mr. Steptoe said, "I'm not what you'd call *superstitious*, but if I was you, young man, I'd not like to take the chance of flying from Havana, here, to Miami."

"Father, you just hush up," his wife said, leaning across to brush a speck from his shirt front. "You're going to bore these young people with your tales."

Dave was anything but bored. What could the old man know of their business in Miami? *If* he knew anything, and wasn't just babbling. "What are you talking about?"

The old woman smiled. "Why, that Bermuda Triangle, dear," she said. "Though why Herbert's scaring you with that when you're not even going there, I can't imagine. You just hush up about that, Father, and order you some dinner. And don't take too much of those chili peppers. You know how they repeat on you. He *will* eat those things," she went on, turning to pat Sara's hand. "They give him the stomach trouble. But when we come down here, he had to eat what the people eat. Says it's silly to have hamburgers when we could just as well stay home and eat at the Howard Johnson's in Duluth."

Sara mumbled a response.

Dave relaxed, curing his own paranoia. "That's the least of my worries," he said, relieved, and a little louder than he intended, added, "Besides, I think all that stuff is just coincidence. Carelessness, radios going out, storms." He forced a laugh. "I don't believe in magic."

"I don't s'pose you do," the older man conceded, grinning. "Young people're always so busy, getting around and getting things done. Wonder sometimes if things need doing all that bad."

His wife turned a reproving eye on him. "Why, Father! What a thing to say." She tsked. "What gets into Herbert sometimes!"

Sara smiled weakly, and Dave looked again at the door, wishing for the thousandth time that Bonnie would come so they could get out of here and into the air, go back to Glendale where people had a decent lack of interest in what you thought or did, what you believed in or didn't, and if people got too off-the-wall you could just go to a different party, drink with a different crowd. Forget the stoned-out visions of cosmic grandeur that had been life and breath to his younger self, but were simply an embarrassment to him now. Not to mention preachments from Sara, who pretended to have forgotten that they had ever thought anything non-scheduled, unless she was beating their collective breast about Danny.

Nobody in their crowd in Glendale regarded such things as anything but silly. As silly as this ridiculous story about the Bermuda Triangle. A figment of somebody's Newton. A thing to read about, watch tv shows about. Well, it did pass the time, waiting for Bonnie. Kept them off dangerous subjects, such as what they were doing here.

"I suppose you believe in that stuff?" Dave challenged the man.

"Son, I believe what I see and hear," the older man replied. "And I've seen a lot. Mother has too." He grinned at his wife's pursed mouth.

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"Can't live a long time in this world without things happening that the big-bugs can't explain, so they tell you you're halloo-hallo . . ."

". . . cinating," Dave finished for him.

"Yep. Seeing things. Some of the things I've seen I wisht *were* hallooc-inations." He tapped a forefinger on the table. "Some of 'em right out there." He pointed in the general direction of the door. "But I saw what I saw, and I heard what I heard."

"And what was that?" Dave asked, peering around Mother to the door again.

"The young woman that was lost, son. Mother and I were out there in our other boat, the one we had before the Marta S. 'Course, that was a long time ago. But I won't *ever* forget it."

"Well, what happened?" Dave looked again at his watch.

"We had the radio on, and we heard what she said."

Dave stared at him with impatience. "Which was?"

"*Is there any way out of this?*" Mr. Steptoe quoted. "That's what. And she never spoke again. She just disappeared."

Dave snorted. "Oh, come on."

He looked Dave in the eye, nodding. "Just as well you're not going back in that direction, seeing what time of year it is. This is when they all happen."

"Do you want me to believe—" Dave began.

"Not a thing, son. You asked me, and I told you, is all. But here—" Mr. Steptoe chided himself, grinning at his wife, who was opening her mouth to do it. "Mother told me not to be scaring you with my tales. Here, girlie—" he called to the waitress who was coming with Dave's and Sara's food. "I'll have some enchiladas, and some free-holies, and—"

Is there any way out of here? Dave smiled grimly to himself as the older man ordered hugely from the spanish menu. He could have told the miserable woman there wasn't. Not for her, or for them. Whatever had caught the woman and all those other ships and aircraft, it was perfectly natural, had some reasonable explanation. A better one, he'd bet, than he had for getting involved in this insane venture. They were *all caught,* though most of them didn't seem to mind, or even to notice. As he tried not to notice, except when Sara insisted on rubbing his nose in painful "facts". He was almost grateful to Mr. Steptoe for bringing up a subject he could dismiss as nonsense, thoroughly dispose of as he wished he could dispose of Sara's irrational notions. But there was no way out of that one.

And no way out of their venture, for as his glance turned again to the opening of the polished door at the far end of the restaurant, Bonnie was there.

Her large purse hung significantly heavy on her crooked arm, She turned slowly in a hip-shot model's stance as she searched the dim-lit restaurant for them, and her lipsticked mouth narrowed as she spotted them. From a distance of twenty feet across the smoky, candlelit room, Dave could feel her anger as she saw them with company. She brushed off the hostess con-

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temptuously and stalked toward the table.

Is there any way out of this?

You have to be kidding.

II

"My god, how could you be that stupid?" Bonnie said again as Dave made a left turn in the rented car, swerving to avoid a group of jaywalking Cubans. "My god, you almost hit those spiks. You're going to get us arrested. Slow down, for godsake. There's a cop!"

In the rear-view mirror, he saw her light a cigarette savagely, throw the match on the floor and step on it. Behind her, out the back window, paired streaks of multi-colored neon fire streamed backward into the depths of the city. Cars dropped away as Dave stubbornly kept his foot down on the gas. Nothing was quite as important as getting this over with, not even Bonnie's rage. They left the police car, uninterested, behind. He made another sharp turn. He hoped he was remembering the right way to the airport. But if he wasn't, Bonnie would tell him.

And she did. "I said, slow down, you fool! And turn at the next right!"

Dave complied, unwillingly. The sooner this was over, the happier he would be. He longed for another beer, or something stronger, but he supposed he had had plenty if he was going to be able to handle the plane and make Miami before Bonnie's appointment with her buyer. Tension weighted his foot, and without his realizing it, the speedometer needle crept steadily upward until Sara's hand flashed forward to brace herself on the dashboard as the tires screamed into another sharp turn. The speed flag. What kindness he still felt for her—a poor and inadequate substitute for love—was wiped out by such tricks. He thought, as he had unnumbered times before, that he would have vastly preferred her to yell.

"I said, *slow down!*" Bonnie shouted in his ear. Sara bit her lip, and kept the bracing hand on the dashboard.

He mashed down on the brake, eliciting a hysterical latin barrage of honking from the driver following, who had had to brake too. Thereafter, he drove exactly at the speed limit, taking enough of his attention to put it somewhere other than in the unfamiliar car with its all-too-familiar distractions, intolerable now past hearing.

Following the rules silenced Bonnie and, as always, mollified Sara. The tension was silent, but it was no less, and he raised his eyes, when breaks in the traffic would let him, to the night sky that was no more visible here than in Los Angeles. The quarter moon was just clearing the top of a pretentious office building some distance ahead. Its face was a dull orange—smog moonlight. He distracted himself from the task and the worry by recalling how the moon looked from up there, pure and luminous. One of the fringe benefits of flying. He had refused to give it up even when Sara's concern had her plumping for everything in the book as an alternative to flying. Anything on how to make a living. Anything but living.

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Had she forgotten how it was up there?

He knew she had. Deliberately forgotten! She would sacrifice anything to the well-being of his body, though care of Danny's had not saved him. It didn't make any sense. And he had to admit, though no alternatives had presented themselves, that what he was doing didn't make any either. If he could find some way to make her remember flying with him—tripping together. But tripping was a dangerous subject, a dangerous word. It made Sara cry, and Sara crying made Dave rage. There was no safe way to remake the crystalline contact, no way for either of them to truly remember what it had been like.

To fly, to forget gravity, ignore entropy, turn away from the face of the mob that moved on the surface, forget the clutching, grabbing, scrabbling creatures that called themselves sentient while they were slaves to rules that made no sense. All irrelevant, from up there. All pointless. Some part of you—of everyone that had ever been there—stayed up when the body come down, remembering what it was like. If they let themselves.

But another part saw and hated Sara's tremulous and ill-hidden relief when he did come down. The ex-mother, begging with her eyes, with the way she held herself, with the trivial comforts of kitchen and bedroom, pleading with him to give up the freedom of the air and stay on the ground. She had lost something essential, something that vivified. Her capacity to care had decayed, day by day, becoming fussiness. She had squeezed the life out of herself by clinging, and out of Dave by clinging to him, setting herself to serve her thwarted maternity in ways that drained his inner essence.

There's no way out, he thought bitterly. You never really escape. Gravity was always there, whether you chose to let it be or not. The pull. The drag.

He refused to let himself glance at her to see if she was still nervous. She was clutching, he knew, the eternal kleenex, buffing dust off the toes of her shoes, picking lint off the pressed legs of her pant suit, checking her face, her hair. All the arsenal of structured time-passers. Even when "the Dreadful" had already happened.

Ah Sara . . . are you in there?

As though she had heard him, she put out a hand and rested it lightly on his thigh. Tension hummed in his thigh muscles, and he turned his mind back to the sky to escape it.

III

In the air, poised between the quiescent sea and the clear midnight sky, some of the tightness began to loosen. The headwind, which had ruffled the tops of the breakers on the beach as they passed over it, heading out across the open ocean, had thinned and died. As perfect a night for flying as he could have wished for. Even Sara was relatively calm. Her hands no longer twisted and clutched. He could almost believe that the task would

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go off without a hitch, if you left out the Steptoes. Small stabs of discomfort plagued him until they actually took to the air. Had he said something stupid to them, revealed too much? But the pure luminosity of the stars and moon in the darkness soothed him. They flew steadily north, the lulling hum of the engine a mantra of peace.

Bonnie sat aft, immersed in the semi-completion of her business. She had had the good sense to keep her mouth shut during take-off, and Dave could ignore her piercing glances, as though he couldn't get into the air without her supervision.

The cloudless night was alive with the flash and glitter of the far stars, interspersed with the nearer and steadier glow of the above-the-horizon planets. Around the unoccluded moon, a haze of moonlight spread out to obscure the stars nearest it with silvery light. With his peripheral vision, he caught the cyclic off-on wink of a yet nearer star. An artificial satellite, he guessed, recalling a long-gone night on the beach with an equally long-gone Sara, when coming down from the sweat and transport of acid, they had lain and watched another such object, following its soundless, dotted-line arc from northwest to its disappearance in the skirts of the southwest glow where the city lay.

"Look there," he said to Sara, pointing. "Isn't that pretty?"

Sara looked, nodded.

"About a half million dollars worth of pretty!" Bonnie's voice drew their attention back into the plane. Turning from the sky and the wink of the object, now seen, now lost in the star-scattered blackness, they saw that the emeralds lay in her lap.

"Pretty, for sure." She laughed exultantly and took one out of its case, holding it to her eye and looking through it at the moon. She put that one back, took up another, turning it from side to side, the huge stone catching the inside lights of the cabin and breaking it into prismatic sparks.

A knot of small islands appeared on the horizon ahead, and crawled across the surface of the ocean, the lights of dwellings disappearing under them. Dave turned back to check his instruments, but the coruscating distraction of her play with the stone made it hard to see. Harder, really, than it should have been. He glanced at the fuel gauge, and found that it registered higher than it should have. Maybe there was a tailwind at this altitude. That was good. But the sparks of emerald light made it hard to read the compass. He could have sworn that it was wavering, but he told himself that it was his imagination. He glanced at it more closely, but it seemed alright. The expected next group of small islands was coming up right on schedule. Yes, there was the village he remembered from the trip out, and a dim light or two here and there. A somewhat brighter single light went out as he watched it. A pang shot through him, as though he had seen someone die. More mind-trips and paranoia. He called himself names savagely. It was only somebody going late to bed in a house on the side of a hill.

He checked his compass again, saw that it was again appearing to

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waver. "Put that stuff away, and quit jiggling it around," he shot back over his shoulder. "You're making it hard to see, flashing lights around."

Bonnie laughed, but the laugh was chopped off as the plane took a sickening drop. Loose objects, including the stones in their nests of velvet, sprang into the air, scattering across the floor. Sara's gasp was drowned in Bonnie's shriek. "What d' you think you're doing?" She went after the stones, scrabbling on hands and knees. Stuffing them back in their case, she shouted, "What did that? What's the matter?"

Dave didn't answer. His attention was on the plane. Heart pounding, he brought the nose up carefully, regained his lost altitude, climbed a little. The compass definitely was acting strangely. The illusion of flickering lights remained, even after Bonnie put the stones in their box and clicked the lock into place. More turbulence dropped them again, though not so far as the first time. Dave struggled with the wheel, through which he could feel a disquieting vibration, and ignored both Bonnie's yelp of outrage and Sara's sudden grasp on his thigh. The business-as-usual view out the front windscreen reproached him. He racked his brain, trying to figure out what was going on, what he had done wrong.

Automatically, he checked his instruments again as his hands turned the wheel to the left. But the glance turned to fixed horror as he saw that the compass was no longer wavering, but spinning counterclockwise. The fuel gauge flopped like a metronome—full, empty, full, empty—measuring out seconds of terrible wrongness.

"Dave, what's wrong?" Sara's voice was high-pitched with overcontrol, but it rose in terror as she suddenly cried out, "What's that?"

Outside the plane, a blue glow was thickening. The stars had disappeared. Even the moon was gone into an azure phosphorescense that clung to the nose and wings as though the plane had excreted it. They flew in a blind, blue fog.

"What *is* that?" Sara repeated, clutching at him frantically, as though naming it fixed it.

But there was no name he could put to it, or to the crazy spinning of his compass, the maddening sweep of his fuel gauge, the vibration that made him clutch the wheel. The vibration grew, threatening to tear the wheel from his hands. He fought its inexplicable waywardness without responding either to Sara's cries or to Bonnie's command of "Stop it right now!"

Bracing the wheel with one hand and his right knee, he reached for the radio microphone, knocking Sara's hand off his thigh. He thumbed the switch. "Mayday! Mayday! This is Roger-Charlie-Dog four eight seven Baker. In trouble over—" He paused for a split eternity to think. "Moselle Reef. Instruments not reliable. Lots of turbulence. Mayday! Mayday! Anybody copy? Mayday!"

Bonnie stumbled forward. She grabbed his shoulder, knocking the microphone out of his hand. It fell with a clunk. Sara hurried to retrieve it and tried to hand it back, but Bonnie struck it from her fingers. "Stop it! I know what you're up to," she raged. "You better hope nobody out there

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heard that. We're not in trouble. You're trying to pull something!''

Dave groped frantically for the microphone. ''You crazy bitch!'' he shouted, eyes on the mad oscillation of the indicators. ''Look at that!'' He jerked his head toward the instrument panel, not daring to take his hand from the wheel. ''And that!'' He repeated the jerk in the direction of the windscreen where the glow of the plane's nose was growing in the seconds of futile struggle. ''Do you think I'm doing that?''

''Yes . . . yes,'' she screamed, still fighting for the mike. ''I know you're doing it. And you'd better stop it. Right now, you—''

''We're falling . . .'' Sara cried shrilly. The steep downward plunge threw her forward, threw Dave against the instrument panel, flung Bonnie against the bulkhead, screaming, ''Stop it . . . stop it . . . stop it . . !''

But there was no stopping it. The wrinkled moonlit sea rushed up toward them, empty now of islands, barren. Empty of hope. And Dave, the pilot in him desperately pulling on the wheel, trying to pull the nose up, knew from the angle of their descent that it was all over.

He tried to see Sara out of the corner of his eye. But she was staring transfixed at the uprushing sea.

''Not me. Not now. Not me . . .'' Bonnie was repeating as they fell.

There was time enough for a laugh to force itself between his clenched teeth.

And then they hit.

IV

Hello, God. This is Snappy Dave Connell, and everything I've ever been taught about dying is wrong.

I know I'm dead, coz we fell in the ocean, me and Sara and this crazy bitch Bonnie and her pretty green rocks, and I'm a hot pilot and I know we didn't make it—I know we hit even tho I don't remember it especially—hell, I don't remember it at all. I do recall that I went out laughing, like I always thot I would back in the old acid days, at the stupidity of it all, the pointlessness, the futility of fighting it.

At least I had the sense to turn off my mind (I think), relax, and float downstream.

I'm dead.

So why do I keep on thinking that the plane, too, is floating, sinking down slowly thru the cool translucence of Reisling seen thru a wineglass?

Why, God?

Why am I still sitting in the cockpit of this plane, and from somewhere hearing my wife freaking out and that other crazy bitch screaming at me to do something?

What am I supposed to do? I'm dead.

Merry Christmas, Connell.

The man was right. I can't quite believe it—I know I'm dead and pretty soon I'm going to either hear flights of angels or come to the Clear Light

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or some damn thing. Which Bardo is this? I should have read more, or remembered what I read, coz I'm no way in the world ready to die just yet, coz I can't remember how it's done.

But evidently I did it.

Hey, God?

Nobody told me you lost your marbles when you died. I could swear I was still sinking, that the plane was sinking with me in it—and Sara, and all—and that it's still settling, quiet as that off-on UFO we saw, falling forever thru the upper air, right before everything went completely crazy and we lost it. That was an artificial satellite, a Sputnik or somesuch, wasn't it?

I am down in the Atlantic in the Bermuda Triangle. I am a freaking statistic. All of us are statistics. How 'bout that? And nobody knows what's down here—not that it matters now. You were right, Mr. Steptoe. Wish you were here instead of me.

That is ridiculous.

I move my dead arm and it responds, and I put it over and around my dead wife, who probably needs some comfort right now, really needs it for a change, coz some people get all freaked out when they die suddenly, I remember, and I give her a hug and I say, "You alright, honey?"

She flings out both arms to grab onto me, but the seat belt holds her down, and she is crying madly now, having something to cry about. "Wha . . . what's . . . hap . . . happening to us?"

And I answer, unbelievable cool, "We're dead, that's all."

The other one, this crazy woman I didn't even know when we were alive, and for sure don't know now, is yelling from where she's sprawled on the floor, surrounded by all the junk that was loose in the plane, plus those totally-pointless-now hunks of green glass that have cost us our lives, because being dead, what good are they?,

"You maniac . . . you . . . you . . . you think you can get away with this? I've got people who are going to come looking for me when I don't show up. Big people. You get us out of here right this minute!"

You hear that, God? She thinks I'm God.

I think it's raining. Pretty silly too, coz it doesn't rain underwater or when you're dead. I could swear I hear the musical drip-drip-drip of water droplets falling and because I'm still tied to my body in some weird way—damn this lap strap—I'm hearing . . . things.

Oh, god, it's hard to really die. To get free from the semblances of the body. Especially when somebody keeps bothering you and hassling you and won't let you do it in peace, but pulls your dead hair and hits you and keeps yelling in your ear. And some-other-body keeps on crying in terror of the newly dead and repeating your name over and over like you're supposed to be some magician and save her, save us all by reaching out a finger and making a big-ass miracle.

"Dave! Dave!

Please, Dave!

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Leave your vessel.

Well, what do you think I'm trying to do? Do you go out thru the top of the head, or out the Muladhara Chakra? Refresh my memory. I knew it all once, but I've forgotten most of it trying to live in Glendale. And you—gosh, you look funny with that tall pointy head and that funhouse outfit that looks like Star Wars, and you have too many fingers and all the wrong shape—you're supposed to be helping me, arent you? Tell me . . . help me out. Hey! Are you the Dweller on the Threshold?

Leave your vessel.

You're a broken record, guy. A great guide across the River of Death. I'd leave in a minute if I knew how. You don't think I like it here, do you? You don't think I'd be here, strapped into this death-box at the bottom of the ocean, if I knew how to leave? Who let you in, funny creature? And you're not anything like I expected you to be. You're not—

V

I am Argos. You will leave your vessel.

The alien's head reached nearly to the roof. It was needle-thin, and needle-shiny, clad in a close-fitting garment of metallic stuff. Its feet and hands were slabs of maggot-colored bloodless meat, ending in a cluster of boneless digits. Its face was no face at all—no mouth, no nose, just a little more highly colored streak across its tall head, and eyes of a reflecting silver, too huge, below its mushrooming head.

Dave's hand released his safety belt and he flung himself toward a rack of tools. Grabbing the nearest, a wrench, he felt he had eternities to swing it, felt himself rise from the floor as though he were dreaming it. He smashed the creature across the side of the head with the wrench, and it fell, folding in the middle as though its center contained the only joint in its body. It clanked as it struck the deck, its rubbery limbs going sprawling.

Blood roared and pounded in his ears. He shook sweat from his eyes, trying to see the creature clearly. Its head was smashed like a windowpane, the translucent dead-white skin torn laterally, showing the cartilaginous bones beneath. There was blood—it must be blood though it wasn't red—seeping like tree sap from the wound.

Sara cried, "You killed it!" She had freed herself from the seat belt and was turning to run through the open hatchway.

Dave grabbed her arm as she tried to pass him. "Don't go out there!" he gasped. "There may be more of—whatever they are."

Bonnie scrambled to her feet and came closer, peering down. Her eyes narrowed. She clutched the emerald case to her breast.

"Get back," Dave said, motioning both women away from the door. "I'm going to look out and see if there are any more out there." Adrenalin rushed in his body. As he stepped over the grotesquely folded body of the alien, oozing milk of magnesia blood, a harsh laugh rose in his throat. It

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shocked him. He had never killed, and felt only revulsion. It took him a second or two to realize that the bark was not some atavistic shout of triumph but an avoidance based on disbelief. He had killed this creature. Killed. He, himself.

"I'm glad you think this is funny," Bonnie hissed. She was pale, almost as pale as the creature.

Sara was nearly as blanched as Bonnie, but she stood straight and looked Dave in the eye. He could almost believe that she understood. He clapped his left hand over his mouth to keep from making another sound and raised the wrench again in his right.

Looking through the window, he could see that a metal gangway had been put up to the hatch of the plane. No more of the creatures were on it. With a sweep of his eye across a brightly lit domed structure, floored with water except for a narrow stretch of flat beach, he could see that no more of them lurked near the plane. "It's clear, he said. "We're in some kind of huge . . . room, it looks like from here. At least, there's something that looks like a door over there. The thing must have come in that way." He avoided looking at the dead thing again, but he felt his mouth quiver with a suppressed laugh. Incredulity erupting again.

"The plane's sitting in water, and how we'll ever get it back in the air, I don't know." He would not think now of what might lie above them—miles of water, or whatever. "Sara, look out the other window and see what's out there. If there are more of those things on the other side we'll have to be careful getting out of here."

Bonnie snorted. "Well, don't think you're taking the stones with you when you go." She shook the case. "These stay right here with me. And I don't know where you think you're going, anyway. You don't know what's on the other side of that door. Or maybe you do, but I'm staying right here until help comes." She crossed to the pilot's seat and sat in it, still clutching the case. She picked up the mike. "How do you make this work? Oh, I see." She pushed in the switch on the side of the microphone. "Hello . . . hello. Anybody there?" A crackle of static was the only answer. "Hello . . ."

Sara was at the opposite window. "Dave, come look at this."

Joining her, the wrench still in his hand, Dave looked out the window. They were not, after all, in a room, but in a gigantic bubble that might have held a whole city. The downward curve of the opposite wall was so far from the plane that he could see no beach, though it must have been encircled by the same narrow stretch of sand. At intervals, the bubble was set with door-like openings, though all were shut. A network of lights illuminated it, strung on some invisible network set in the reflective material of the dome. The intense, yellow-white light stared pitilessly down on a gently swelling floor of seawater, out of which rose, to the right of where the plane sat in the shallows, a derelict pile of rubbish reaching roughly a third of the way to the roof. Planes, and parts of planes. Crushed, broken and torn, soaked with seawater and stacked like cord-wood against the far

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wall of the dome.

"Are they. . . ?" Sara faltered.

"Yes," Dave answered grimly. A large fragment of one of the planes, an old low-wing Tamco that lay a little nearer than the rest, was sticking up out of the sand with its nose and one wing intact, reaching to the vanished sky like a crushed bird. A flat white, disarrayed pile of bones, obviously human, lay across the step and out onto the sand. There was no skull, only a collapsed ribcage, arms and hands, and the backbone. The skeleton ended at the third vertebra above the shoulders.

Sara caught the narrowing of his eyes as he peered, transfixed with shock. "What's . . ."

"Never mind. There's nothing in the world we can do for anybody who was in those planes." He pulled her away before she could look closer. "We have to get out of here."

"But where are we going to go?" Sara hesitated as he urged her toward the door.

"Out of here. We're not just going to sit here and wait for something to happen." He started to follow her, passed the rack of tools where he had obtained the wrench. He selected a much larger one, and dropped the first. For the first time in his life, he wished he had a gun. But seeing again the body of the alien thing where it had fallen, he supposed that he could make do with what came to hand if he had to. "Are you coming with us?"

Bonnie turned and gave him a look of scorn, then turned back to the microphone, helloing into the silence.

He pushed past Sara and stepped out onto the gangway, taking her by the hand with him. They were alone. No voices or other sounds of life disturbed the quiet, in which he could hear the soft, waveless splash of the water on the tail of the plane. At the foot of the gangway, the alien's footprints, narrow and triangular with the widest part toward the heel, marred the damp sand. It was strange, Dave thought, that there were no drag marks showing the movement of the gangway.

The footprints led directly to the door opposite where their plane sat. Best to avoid that door, though there were no guarantees as to what he might find behind the others. Could there be water behind the doors?

He forced himself to recall the look of the alien's smashed head—though he would have liked to expunge the scene from his mind forever—to see if he could remember it having had gills, or anything that might serve as gills. But there was nothing. It had had no nose, but from what he recalled it was not apparently a water-breather. He hurried Sara down the beach toward the next door. But the sand there was disturbed, kicked about by milling footprints. And from that door several other sets of overlapping prints led off in the direction of the heap of wrecked aircraft. These were not the triangular prints of the creatures, but appeared human. But none of them led away from the door, all were going in. No escape, at least not from here.

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Dave swallowed hard. Pushing Sara in front of him now, he quickened his pace, and made for the next door. The sand was flat and undisturbed between the place where the human footprints came up out of the water and the door, some fifty yards distant. The only sound was the ragged gasping of their breath and a slight buzzing in Dave's ears. They ran heavily through the loose sand and finally reached the door. Dave let out his breath in a heavy sigh of relief when he saw that there were no footmarks, either human or alien, on the sand in front of it. But the buzzing in his ears was growing. It was an electronic hum, maybe it was the power for the lights.

The door had an air and moisture seal around it, and was rounded at top and bottom. About eighteen inches higher than a doorknob would have been there was a wheel. Whatever else might be down here, the door had obviously been installed for the use of the much taller aliens. But it was not too high to reach. He put up his hand, grasped it, and gave a tug. It refused to turn. He wiped sweat from his palm and jerked on it again, hauling with all his weight. Nothing. It hung there, too high, mocking him. It ought to turn, dammit. It had to turn! He swung up the wrench, enraged and desperate, and brought it down with a resounding clang on the metal wheel. Still nothing. He hit it again. And again. Sweat reached his eyes, stinging. His hands were slippery with it, and he nearly lost his grasp on the wrench.

Feeling something clinging to his arm, he swung around, raising the wrench.

"Dave . . . Dave, please! Try turning it the other way. At least try it. All that noise . . . somebody . . . something might hear it!" He could hardly hear her with the pounding of his heart and the increasing buzzing noise in his ears.

But he understood through his panic, and cursed himself for losing his temper and his common sense. He tried to smile, but from her grimace he knew he'd failed. "Okay . . . it's okay," he said, too loud, over the buzzing. He swung the wrench and banged it downward on the wheel in the other direction. It gave a little, and his relief was so great when he reached up to pull it around that he laughed aloud. He could feel Sara's breath on his ear as she cried out, "Thank God!" She clutched his shoulder. "Thank—"

The door hit the outer wall with a clang. There were many aliens behind it, and the noise of their weapons—if they made any—was drowned in an engulfing explosion of white-out fog that wrapped around him before he had time to think of anything, of the discarded wrench, of Sara, of fighting back. He plunged into a sickening downward spiral, his hands searching for the familiar slick plastic of the wheel. Got to get control of the plane coz we're falling. I'm losing it. But the domed, underwater world was fading, fading . . . and gone.

Pop!

Oh Lord . . . this is really it this time.

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This time I know I am dead. I have to be, because they'd never let me live after I smashed one of them up. Killed him . . . her . . . it?

But this time I know it.

I can see . . . though everything is misty . . . my body lying down there.

That's strange. Why does it seem to be down? Oh yeah. Everything looks down from up here. I remember this from somewhere, but I can't recall just where. Not a bad body. Good while it lasted. But getting soft. In the head. All the same, I was pretty fond of it. And of her, down there struggling. Hey! It's no use, honey. I'm dead. You can quit fussing coz it's happened. Quit struggling. Sara, don't fight it. I'm dead and that's all there is to it. Lordy, what a fighter. Never knew she was such a scrapper. Well yeah, I did. But that was such a long time ago, and she's gotten so . . . so smothering. Fusses. Over Danny—tho God knows she had reason to fuss over him. Over me, like now. Made me feel old and tired.

But I guess I'm not going to have to sweat that any more, Am I? Am I, you. Whoever comes to get you when you're really *dead?*

Well?

Sara, you're crying. I see you down there, trying to knock those creatures out of the way and get to my body. But I'm not in there. That's not me. So you don't have to cry and carry on and fight them. And even if there's no chance for you to get away you can come with me. I'm here—up here! Just wait. I see—and how I see I couldn't tell you—that they can't carry you. They're too fragile, too weak to carry anything as heavy as a human body. I suppose they're going to leave my body lying there till it goes to bones like that other poor guy in the Tamco. Pity about that. I liked it, tho I never got a whole lot of good out of it the last little while. You liked it too, though you coddled it too much. That's right, go with them. You can figure out a way to get free.

Hey! What's that they're doing with my body? What's that thing? A whole gang of them, raising my body and putting it on something like a stretcher, but it doesn't have any handles. It rises, no kidding, rises in the air by itself. So that's how they got the gangway out to the plane without leaving tracks.

What do they want with it? Even if it is mine. Especially one that has a smoky rope attached to it. A rope that goes, bigod, it goes to right here, right into me! I can look down and see where it goes into my stomach, plugged in there and pulsing. I reach to touch it.

I can see my hands. My very own hands with the square blunt nails, and that's my wedding ring on the left one, and on the right, my opal that I bought while I was dealing and had money to spend on trinkets and pretties. And now I don't have enough money to pay the mortgage and I wind up on a crazy trip like—

Hey, guys. Somebody? Anybody? I could relax and float downstream if somebody would answer the phone. Get the thing, and make the buzzing stop.

It's coming from this direction. If I just keep moving, I can get to it and

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turn it off. Down this hall. Here's the door. That design on the door there seems to have worn well. Kept its colors. The star in the center seems to float somewhere behind the rest of the sigil. You could reach out and touch it and feel as though you were putting your hand thru the door. And strangely, you do. But not really so strange. That's what the design was for. And all the rest follows.

Follows the star, which won't stay still, but moves, rearranges itself, some above, some below. Triangles joined to triangles, and it shapes itself into a pyramid, the door with the star opens, and I enter, I am inside it, before the crystal that is also a pyramid, with the Seat of Power at the Place of Power, the crystal steps ascending.

I look up and see a figure there, a man long-haired and robed, with the green glow of an emerald on his forehead.

This is too much. I'm hallucinating. If he's the one who is supposed to collect my soul after death, he sure doesn't look too happy about it.

VI

—I greet you in the name of the Twelve—he says. —I am Arien, guardian of the Crystal.—

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but I say, —Are you the Dweller on the Threshold?—

This gets something like a grin from his haggard face, and he says, —You will not contend with that One until you come to the holy place in the flesh.—

—Flesh?— I say, startled. *—Then I'm not dead this time, either?—*

—You live, and have left your body. Your spirit is drawn by the power of the Cyrstal.— He comes down the steps as though floating above them. —Listen to me. We have not much time before your body awakens, and I have much to show you.—

—Well, if I'm not dead, then where am I?—

—That I shall show you. For many cycles I have waited, waiting in the holy place, and have watched the Invaders spread their nets for victims. To some I have spoken, but none have met the Dweller in their flesh and lived to free the Crystal and themselves.— And he comes closer to me. I see the huge stone on his forehead glowing green with energy. If Bonnie ever saw that stone she'd flip. A piercing ray comes from it and spreads around me.

I see pictures in the light of the emerald he wears. We stand together on a high place and view a city spread out below us. It's laid out in circles, and I know that it's no city I have ever seen before, but it's familiar somehow. People are moving on the streets below, vehicles, traffic bustling. He gives a call like a muezzin, and they look up. I look down, and I see that we're standing in a window, high up on the side of a pyramid, like the pyramids of Egypt, but this ain't Egypt.

—Behold Poseidia— he tells me.

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—Poseidia?— I say, puzzled.

—I see that you have knowledge of our land, though I see in your mind it has been sunk these many centuries below the waves. Require understanding of yourself.— He turns and taps me on the forehead, a peculiar, syncopated rhythm, and all of a sudden I realize that what he's showing me is what we call Atlantis, but they called it something else. And that means that the pyramid we're standing on has been ten thousand years under the sea.

Under the sea. I begin to get it, and he smiles his haggard smile, knowing it.

—Your body lies in the precincts of this same pyramid. You were brought here by the Invaders, as others have been brought. Through the centuries they have used humans as a means to draw out the crystal's energy. They themselves cannot do so, for they are not as we. They cannot enter into contact with one another or with the Greater Harmony. Knowing much, but understanding little, they imagine that the brain *is all. And so human brains they employ to direct the crystal's energy to their ships. Their science is great, their spirits small. Many are the travellers—navigators, captains of ships, pilots of aircraft—that they have captured and used. But I see that you know this. I give thanks to the Power that you came here in spite of danger.—*

Lord, has he got it all wrong! Jim Dandy to the rescue—I can't let him believe a lie about me, so I say, —Look, I'm not here because I'm a good guy. Yes, I knew about it. But I have to tell you that I didn't believe it, I thought it was all coincidence, the stories about this place.— I try to look him in the eye, make him understand. —I'm a crook, sir. A lawbreaker.—

—It is well that you do not try to hide it. I understand your purpose. Nevertheless, the Power has used you, and you will use It to drive out the Invaders, these disruptors of Harmony, from another world.—

—Sir, I'm just a guy. I don't know what I can do to . . . —

But he's smiling for real now. —Listen, and I will tell you. The Holy Object is not a machine, but a crystal. As such, its energy does not decay, but lives on though it is sunk beneath the water. Its energy field enclosed it, protecting it. It lives now. But it must be directed by a priest in his flesh. My body died in the cataclysm, and I can no longer utilize it. For that, you must serve. Other captives have been here, have broken free of their captors and come to the holy place. But most imagined that they dreamed, or that they were mad. Some did go mad and killed themselves when they realized what the Invaders meant to do.—

—Then how am I going to . . . —

—Observe this device,— he tells me, pointing to the green stone on his forehead. —All others like it will serve to focus the energy of the crystal. We used them to heal bodies, hear thoughts. All the captives had such stones on their bodies, or near them. But none have been such that they could lay aside the personality and become one with the crystal, as I see you can do.—

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—Let me get this straight. You want me to get back into my body and take over the crystal from the aliens and destroy them? How am I supposed to do this? I'm not a priest. I'm just a man.—

—You must obtain one of the stones from the woman. The Invaders are bringing her now to the chamber where your body lies. It will lead you to the chamber of the Power. You must mount the steps on which you first saw me. The crystal will show you what you must do.—

—That's not a whole lot to go on. Get the stone. How will I . . .—

—You will know. Everything important is obvious.—

—But . . . —

—You must return. Remember.—

"Remember."

Hearing him speak, Sara leaped up and ran to the table on which Dave's body was lying. He sat up and swung his legs over the edge, a terrible urgency prodding him into action. A warning hum keened in his ears, he had heard it before. *They* were coming.

Wildly, he looked around the room for some weapon, but there was nothing. The bare, shining walls and tables stared back at him blankly. The room had three doors, featureless except for the wheel in the center of each. This was a cell. He knew the doors would be locked, except when the aliens brought prisoners or took them away to be robbed of their brains. Panic rose like sour bile in his throat. Sara tried to make him sit down. She obviously couldn't hear the humming that threatened to burst his eardrums.

He had to do something! Find some weapon! Only if he could overpower the alien bringing Bonnie (How did he know there was only one?) could he follow his instructions.

He looked down. Sara's boots! High, with pointed heels.

He pushed her down on a bench and knelt, ripping down the zippers of the boots. "What are you—"

"Here, take this." He shoved one of the boots into her hand and jerked her over to the door that made his ears hum most loudly.

"Be quiet. They're coming," he whispered savagely. Her face twisted in terror. "Bonnie will come through first. Let her by, then hit the thing with the boot heel. When it's down, run through the door."

The wheel in the door was turning. He held the boot high. The door swung open, and Bonnie entered, a single alien behind her. Sara froze, as he had been afraid she might. Dave hit the alien with all his strength. It folded, toppling. He swung the boot again, hitting it squarely between the eyes.

Bonnie whirled around. "You fool," she screamed. The emerald case was in her hand. She swung it at him. "He wasn't going to do anything. What did you hit him for? You—"

He caught the case as it swung, ripped it out of her hand. Holding her off, he cracked it on the wall, and it burst open, scattering the stones. She clawed him as he grabbed for one. He pushed her away and she fell. Her

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head hit the floor with a crack. In the silence, his ears began to hum again. More aliens were on their way. Across the room, one of the other door-wheels began to turn.

"Get out!" he yelled to Sara. He grabbed her, pulled her through the open door, threw all his weight on it, and slammed it shut.

He spun the wheel until he heard something click, hoped to god it was locked, but hadn't a second to waste making sure. He turned quickly, squinting in the gloom of the hall, then spun around as he heard crackling. An ozone smelling haze came spreading through the door. Metal melted and wept molten drops down the door's surface. The door-wheel quivered but didn't turn. Dave let out an incredulous gasp as he realized that the weapon had locked the door behind them.

Where to run to? There's wasn't much light in here. It was evidently not part of the alien's regular quarters. Narrowing his eyes, he could see that they were in a furniture-cluttered hall, lit by globular fixtures, not bright, but quite enough to reveal them if they didn't get away fast before the aliens burst through.

Where to run to? Where to go?

He ran a sweating hand down his pants leg. There was a lump in his pocket. The emerald he had thrust there as Bonnie grappled with him! As his fingers touched it, he knew which way to go. "Come on," he croaked.

They ran, clattering and stumbling, through a maze of halls, passageways, rooms. Even as he ran, towing Sara, Dave felt a pulling, a guidance that let him know the right way. They were nearly at the end of their strength when he saw, across a gallery, something he recognized. A mammoth double door with a six-pointed star on it. He ran for it, flung himself at it. It swung open and they fell through into total darkness.

They heard a sound like the sigh of a giant turning in his sleep. With the sound, a sub-sonic hum thrummed under their feet. Without any warning, everything was lit.

VII

Sara caught her breath. But Dave, hand on the emerald in his pocket, knew where they were. Up there, at the top of those steps, he had seen the priest. This was the crystal, lit from beneath with a living glow.

This was it, the thing he had seen in his vision. He half expected to see the drawn face of Arien peering down at him from the seat at the top of the translucent stairs. The Place of Power.

But there was no priest there. There was no living being other than themselves in the spacious chamber. There was no Twelve in the seats of the Twelve. No acolytes that he *knew* should be at the bank of switches behind the shining height of the crystal. It's living ascendance was alone here. Alone with two grubby, panting humans that somehow had been drawn to it.

He drew the emerald out of his pocket and held it up. It caught the

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piercing light of the mammoth crystal and took fire from it. He put his hands on Sara's shoulders. "You alright?" The emerald touched her flesh, and a shiver ran through her body. Her head, which had been drooping, came up. Some reflection, it seemed, from the verdant fires of the emerald, caught in her eyes, and she drew a shaky breath. "Yes. You're going to have to do something here, aren't you? Something dangerous?"

He nodded, wondering how to tell her. But suddenly he knew that he wasn't going to have to tell her. She smiled with sudden genuine pride. "Well, go ahead then." She turned away from him, crossing to the row of seats where the Twelve had sat. She sat down, laid her arms along the arms of the chair.

Dave crossed the chamber to the darkened bank of switches. As he passed around the crystal, he imagined it looked at him searchingly, pondering whether he could wield the thing. Or maybe it was the invisible eyes of the priest on him, the last servitor of the crystal, waiting to see him press the panels that would turn that unearthly light into directed energy.

The switches, crystal plates set flush with their surrounding panel, were dark. He knew they would light up when he pushed the right ones, and that they would be beryl-green, like the stone he held in his hand.

In his hand. . . . Sudden dizziness swept over him as he remembered that the stone was to be bound to his forehead, if its placement on the head of Arien in his vision was clear. He rummaged his pockets, found nothing to use to bind it. He passed the back of his hand across his eyes, and suddenly he heard the buzzing again. He couldn't waste any more time.

Fishing in his pocket, he found his pocket knife, yanked out his shirt-tail and nicked it, tore it off. Kneeling before the bank of switches, he laid the emerald in the middle of the rag, folded it over, twisted it tightly and bound it to his forehead as he rose again.

He flinched from the sudden babble of voices that assaulted his mind. They screamed, wailed, entreated. His interior receptors, unfolding like the petals of a terrible flower, were picking up the mad yammering of human creatures. Oh, god, there were others alive in this place. Looking closer, despite the horror, he found that he was listening to the amplified, disembodied mind-voices of the biocomputers, the enslaved brains of the humans that powered the alien's ships.

Nausea threatened to overwhelm him. No, he wouldn't look at it any more. There was nothing he could do for whatever disembodied wretches had ended their lives like this. If they were ever to be free, if he and Sara were to be free, he would have to go on, do whatever it was that he had to do. He jerked the probing sensors of his mind back to the inner chamber, reached out to touch Sara.

A low, almost musical tone emanated from her, interrupted with discordant bursts of inner conflict. As he fought to free their bodies, Sara fought herself. Shaken out of her lethargy by the terror of their experience, she was recalling what she had been, what they had been. Trying to direct her

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woman's strength outward to him, to overcome her fear. And making it, though she was still frightened. But not for his physical safety any longer. Just frightened, and that was natural. Her interior tone grew stronger, and he set himself to match it, discovered in himself a harmonic, as though they hummed a chord, part of a chord, on two notes. Then a third note could be heard, supplying a basso completion so profound and completely satisfying that Dave began to lose himself in it.

—Please—don't linger. They come!—

It was the priest. Dave shook himself, reached out a hand and placed it flat on the third switchplate from the left. Its light came up as the crystal's had. He pushed it twice, and the white light decayed to green. He did the same with two other plates, placed his right hand, palm down, in an opening above and behind the bank of switches, and felt a tingle.

This done, he turned and went back around to the front of the crystal. The steps were before him. He swallowed hard, and put his right foot on the first.

I don't have any right to be here, no right at all. I'm just a lousy small-time pilot on a dangerous, illegal flight to nowhere. Dangerous to myself and Sara, and harmful to that stupid Bonnie, who'd probably have found some other poor idiot to fly her on this job if I hadn't, but that's not my business, is it? I went for it, went for an easy out to a problem I let happen myself. I'm not worthy to put my feet on these steps. I'm defiling them with every step I take. My mere presence darkens the purity of the crystal, pollutes the Holy of Holies.

I'm so tired. I want to sleep . . .

My foot comes up to the next step. It burns.

Hot, I used to get so hot with the unfairness of what was happening to us that I wanted Danny to die and have it over with. I wanted to hit Sara, to get her to quit looking like a martyr, make her yell, or cry, or something. Anything to be doing something *about it, anything, make some gesture in the face of the unfairness. Who asked for this—the kid we both loved, the life we'd made, destroyed? I used to get so hot about a lot of things: the war, the pollution, the cops, the users of the good things, the wasters. But I couldn't get anyone to see it, help me do something. Sara, sitting by Danny's bed all the time, reading him stories, lifting him, bathing him. I couldn't handle even seeing him, tried to get her out of there and get involved in something we could change. But she couldn't get interested in it. Didn't want to hear about anything outside the house and Danny. Wanted to talk about Danny, about us, about me, about her. Little things, trivia! I wanted to do something* big *to make it better. But I'm all bogged down in this petty day-to-day bullshit that won't make a goddamn bit of difference in a thousand years. Or will it?*

I take another step, like trying to swim upward in a pool of syrup, heavy, dragging at me.

I've said that a million times, haven't I? A thousand years? This has been going on for ten thousand years, and it still makes a difference, be-

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cause it happens to us, happens to people, individual people. We have to live with it, each of us. Have to sweep up our own crap. And I haven't swept up mine, all the small, but significant details of my personality, the Dave Game. An accusing, self-pitying crock of crap. That's all I did, all I accomplished while telling myself how trapped I was by a sick kid and a martyred wife, I who had seen the building blocks of the universe in living color *and knew just where it was at better than anyone else except for Sara, who was Shakti, and didn't have to know, but was It.*

Another step. Someone bled here. Someone fell here, trying to get where I'm going. Someone turned and ran screaming out of here rather than face all this. But there's no escape, no way out of this. Wouldn't matter if I did run. I'm a hopeless mess. We're all hopeless. Me, him, her. All ridiculous and small and mean. We deserve to die in sight of the top. Deserve it.

Have to die, because who could hope to be clean enough to use the power of the crystal, use that sacred energy in the shape we're in. Man shape, earth shape. I can't take this clumsy, cruddy piece of meat machinery with me up there, this Daveness, this darkness.

Oh, Sara, honey, I'm sorry. Sorry I was so blind and petty and small. You were right. All those feelings I was too proud to feel. Disappointment and pain and anger and fear. Kept it locked up inside me till it rotted me, killed all the loving in me and turned it into bitterness. Locked me up in this figuring machine, this calculator.

One more step.

I'm so tired. I'm ready to die. I can't think of any other way to get free of all the shit I am. Death . . .

So hard to keep moving. So hard to put one foot in front of the other. I know which Bardo this is, alright. And I can't fight it. Can't go on. Dragging, pulling, heaviness. . . .

Step. There's the light above me . . . seen that before. I might just be able to die for all of them, if I can't live for them. Got to get close enough to the light to burn all this sick heaviness out of me, this ugliness, this mindtrapped Daveness. Monsters down there. Monster up here. I'm the monster, and I carry the monstrosity with me, it oozes out my pores, out of my head, my body, and I see it take on a twisted form of its own, but still me, blocking the way to the light with my soiled humanness.

Step. It's standing there, all teeth and claws and hair and fangs. Menacing, threatening. Like something out of a comic book, and me still down there climbing, pitiful. Well, kill me if you can, creature, but I'm still going to keep on coming till you kill, keep on trying to get to the light.

I raise my impossibly heavy foot to the last step, push at it with my leaden hands, try to brush it aside, this tulpa *of mine.*

It dissolves like mist in the sun. And I hear faint laughter.

High up here. High and pure, a crystal protrusion into the material world, pulling down light and energy from some etheric otherness to ensoul and vivify the land, and with it the world. As I turn, the floor of the inner chamber looks miles away down there, as though I stood at Mt.

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Meru and saw the whole world below me, worshipping, coming to postulate and wash their bodies in the energy. Only there's just Sara down there, sitting so bravely and quietly in the lesser priest's chair. You'd never know she was scared. You'd never know that I was, up here at the top of that Jacob's Ladder of a stairway. And I never got to wrestle with the Thing. It was really me, anyway.

But those things outside . . . they're not me. They're not part of the Greater Harmony. They come from someplace else, some planet where life is cheap, other creatures lives trivial. Well, they'll get my head, but not the way they think. My head . . . a tuning fork of a thing on its fragile stalk of neck . . . I brought it here to the Seat of Power to offer for use. You hear that, Arien? I'm here, and hey, I even know the right words to say.

I desire to know in order to serve.

Read that somewhere, and a good thing, too.

But I don't suppose it matters. Attitude, that's what counts up here, not words. And this is our planet, our learning. These others, now, they're not supposed to be here, no matter what poor schleps need to get into the True Believer bit about flying saucers. I have to cut off their supply lines that are tapped into the energy and send them back where they belong. Have to relax, tune into it, get above and outside Dave Connell who's feeling scared, looking at the creatures, and just serve. Do the thing.

I sit in the high, carven seat. The walls of light close around me and seem to thrum, very low, a mantra to soothe me, soothe Dave down and to sleep. The work is to do, and nobody needs ole Dave. Go to sleep, sucker. Just cool it. Listen to the pretty music and dream good dreams.

Perfection! The material object that sits on the body of the earth, living geometry, effortless, flowing. I follow it down, to its base where the fundament of the crystal joins its roots to the earth, and deeper, splitting into the conscious reality of paradox, the growth of the material crystal from the material earth–and the connection into a scintillant dimension of unformed energy. It bleeds, no, it breathes, it spills, through this medium, energy out onto the material level. Dave is not quite asleep. He dreams, and tries to fit words to all this. A waste of my time.

Ah, here's the Harmonic of Delta sleep. I reach out to it, activate it, and switch him off.

Harmonics. A place for everything, and everything singing. And I'm at the center, the critical connection. The only moving part. I could beat cosmic time with my fingers. If I had fingers. But I've got something better. I beat time with long, long exhalations, inhalations of energy.

But there's a drain somewhere. Time, energy, relentlessly slipping away, leaking out through some crack in the outer surface of my reality. One big leak.

Right there.

Focus just right, and I can see the whole cancerous installation of the Invaders, surrounding me on two sides. It's connected to me, rooted in my

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pyramid-body, sucking up the flow of energy and using it to—

—Just so. The breach must be healed. Disconnect the brains they have used to tap into the Stone. Seal them off.—

Wait a minute. They're big, so intricately locked into the flow that it'll take attention and time to cut them off without damaging the crystal. I slide my awareness down the pulsating surface of the energy field to the tap-in, and it's so huge, so bloodily pouring energy into the creature's machinery that it'll take major surgery to fix it. Careful. . . .

—Seal it!—

But I know as my mind threads its way down into the hungry gush of energy through into the alien's quarters that there is no doing this quickly. To hurry is to chance damaging the ancient, holy thing.

—Hurry!—

Wait just a damn minute! If I go too fast and jiggle the crystal's integrity, I'll blow this piece of the Atlantic into the upper atmosphere. It'll rain crystal in Boston, and lord knows where else.

Let's look this system over and see what has to be done. I want out of here. Dave wants out. Bodies are fragile, and I'm pretty fond of mine. Sara's too. So don't rush me.

I have to take a look at this. Now, if the alien's quarters are hooked in on two sides of the pyramid, and I cut it off here, *the feedback from the force-block will give me an overload in sections three through seven. I'll have to cut down the flow gradually to Beta level and at that level the field can hold it and not be shaken apart by feedback.*

The ebbing energy slows with a dopplering whine like worn-out brakes, and I think it's not supposed to make that noise as I slowly narrow the field. But I go ahead. I focus my awareness and it's like looking through a glass onion—the superimposed vibratory rates—as I reduce the level still further, apply the tourniquet of my mind to the wound in the crystal's field. I see them running around in a frenzy over there, dashing for the control complex.

Oh-oh. Might have known they'd fight. Six of them standing at the control console, disciplined, machine-like. With one shouting orders. He doesn't know what's cutting off their energy, but he's going to stop it if he can. He increases—with the busy, boneless fingers of his underlings, and I decrease—with the disembodied 360 degree input of my awareness, focused through the crystal. I hear a high whine as we struggle, a sound that I know is wrong. I follow it, let its wrongness draw me close enough to observe, and—

Overload!

VII

In an instant I see raw, ravening energy, too powerfully drawn from the complex interior workings of the crystal's energy field. I know where I am, and what I'm doing, but I seem to be seeing beyond time. Ten thousand

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years of technology stretches backward out of my conscious awareness and the shrieking overload expands, contracts, expands again, shaking the very earth. It thrums in the bowels of the continent. Glass shatters, building stones crumble and smash on the paving blocks of the outer courtyard. The Twelve's concentration wavers, and they break, leap from their seats and run from the inner chamber in terror, charge blindly through the halls, forgetting their task. They strike down the waiting supplicants, who wail to them to stop the vibration that is shaking the earth apart.

But nothing can save them, the Twelve or their people. In the outer air, the very atmosphere is electric with terror. Lightning strikes from a clear sky, the earth quakes relentlessly, the overloaded crystal keens its knell.

Escape! I have to get us out of here.

Dave jumped to his feet, slipping on the polished floor. Flinging out a hand to catch himself, he touched the substance of the crystal, felt the vibration through the glasslike walls. He ran down the stairs, feeling the vibration even through the soles of his shoes. He grabbed the white faced Sara, jerked her to her feet, and they ran.

There was no buzzing, humming warning of aliens. Evidently they were all engaged in the struggle with their energy systems. Dave and Sara fled panting back the way they had come, Dave leading, searching out the path with a part of his mind that he knew was altered *forever*.

He cast his awareness out, and could see, even touch, the controls of the force-bubble that had brought them down, englobed them in energy and carried them to the undersea hangar. Through the pain of a stitch in his side, he reached out, tried to touch the controls, and gave a gasping laugh when he felt them respond.

Here was the right door. They ran through it, leaving it open.

In the flickering light, they could see the plane where it rocked in the shallows, the gangway scraping in the wash of sudden waves.

They pounded up the gangway. No reason to be quiet now. The note of vibration was rising, rising, and a new sound interposed itself, a rhythmic thump, that raised waves and sent them crashing onto the narrow beach. Dave kicked the gangway aside, closed and dogged the door. They dropped into their seats.

Dave hit the ignition, and it caught. His eyes went to the control panel, swept it, forgot it. All systems were abnormal, but there was no time to do anything about them. He reached out with his mind, activated the force field, which closed in around the plane. They began to go forward.

A section of the far wall seemed to thin and dissolve as they skimmed toward it. He heard himself gulp as it happened, stupidly; he was doing this himself. The tropical shimmer of ocean water danced and flickered before the speeding plane, but he saw it through several layers of ill-matched glass. He choked on a sound that might have been a laugh or a sob as the suspended plane passed through the arching wall and they found themselves surrounded by the blue dance of mobile ocean.

The plane rose too slowly in the bubble field, like a spent breath from

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some bottom-dwelling monster. There was no sound fron the engine, and none from the force-field that enclosed them. Dave imagined he could feel a tremble of vibration, but told himself it was in his mind. That they still had time.

The plane hung in watery space far above the submerged pyramid, rising, rising. The illusion of vibration grew as they rose, and shuddered on the edge of sound. As he peered forward through the windscreen, the nose again glowed with the same halo of blue light he had seen before they fell.

Suddenly, pain struck him, and he could hear quite clearly the rising pitch of the over-burdened, too-taxed crystal. Like some tortured thing, it screamed its protest into his shrinking ears, fear-sweat was icy on his skin as he looked frantically upward, calculating the distance to the surface. It hung above the plane like a roof, growing closer.

Then they were through it. The plane rose into the air, climbing. The engines, silent since Dave had switched on the field, were still, unnaturally silent. Minute vortices of energy spun on the interface of the field, obscuring their view of the open sky. But it was sky. Real sky!

Head pounding with the shrilling of the overloaded crystal, Dave looked down, and saw a strange radiating pattern of milky lines on the surface. These converged on a central point, multiplied and began to spin, bulging upward in the center like an eye.

Speechless, he heard the engine sputter to life, catch, and begin to roar. He gaped at the instruments, tearing his eyes away from the up-rushing maelstrom of ocean below, and pulled the nose up. The plane climbed, away from the boiling sea.

The radio crackled and spoke. "What the hell was that?" a man's voice shouted tinnily.

"No data," replied another voice. "No dat—" "My God, look down there! You seeing what I'm seeing, Bob? Looks like the bottom of the ocean exploded!"

"Hey Lauderdale! Come in, Lauderdale! Come in Tower! I think a bomb exploded down there!"

"Here comes the wave," the radio reported. Dave could see the racing curve of it, shock-propelled, as it passed under them. The radio screamed with a confusion of voices from craft on the surface. Some were silenced as the wave hit them. But it seemed to Dave that he could still hear them.

The emerald burned on his forehead. He could feel Sara's pity as each new report, each new SOS came through, feel the dying, the terror, as the tsunami smashed toward the land. He put up a hand to the emerald.

There were no more aliens in the undersea installation. Water, unlike the first time, swept through the inner chamber of the crystal. It was sunk, perhaps forever this time. Washed clean.

As the emerald could wash minds clean, bodies clean from disease and pain. As it could heal, he discovered with wonder, probing the possibilities. Sara took his hand, and he reached out his mind to calm the fear in her, wash it away with emerald light. She smiled, tears on her face.

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Ahead there would be work to do, more work than he had ever undertaken in his life. He'd have no time for the meaningless chatter of cocktail parties, no energy to waste on trying to turn Sara into something other than she was. She was alright. He was alright.

But that was fine. It had to be.

He was going to be very busy from now on.

There was no way out of it.

—JANE GALLION

NEW YORK *(continued from Page 55)*

which is also owned by CBS seems not to be involved in the suit. However CBS did have plans to merge Fawcett and Popular Library. It remains to be seen how the S. E. C. suit will affect the merger.

SF Bestsellers: The August N. Y. Times Book Review showed *Larry Niven* and *Jerry E. Pournelle*'s LUCIFER'S HAMMER in the top 5 for several weeks on the paperback list. A fantasy novel, LORD FOUL'S BANE, did very well on several national paperback polls. THE WHITE DRAGON by *Anne McCaffrey* has sold extremely well in hardcover, sales topping those of James Michener's CHESAPEAKE in some areas.

George R. R. Martin's second anthology, NEW VOICES IN SF: II, will be out from Jove in February.

Lin Carter and L. Sprague de Camp will have a new Conan book out from Bantam. The title is CONAN THE LIBERATOR.

Kate Wilhelm has completed a new novel, JUNIPER TIME—it will be out sometime this spring.

Poul Anderson is working on a new novel, MERMAN'S CHILDREN, portions of which appeared in the Flashing Swords anthologies.

H. Beam Piper's estate is now being handled under the auspices of Jerry E. Pournelle, who is cooperating with Ace Books to bring out new works based on Piper's literary corpus. William Tuning, a frequent contributor to *Analog,* is writing the third novel of the popular Little Fuzzy series. Jerry Pournelle is writing the sequel to SPACE VIKING, entitled SPACE VIKING'S RETURN.

Robert Silverberg has sold the rights for his new novel LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE to Harper & Row for $127,500 the highest sum ever paid for hardcover rights to an SF book. The novel sold from an outline. Mr. Silverberg will finish the writing sometime this summer. The novel is described as a long epic adventure set on an extrasolar planet twenty thousand years in the future.

John Varley's second novel, TITAN, will be out in the spring. It sold to Berkley-Putnam for $20,000.00.

Jack L. Chalker will have a novel coming from Berkley-Putnam in February. The title is THE IDENTITY MATRIX.

Randall Garrett will have a book, TAKEOFF, out from Starblaze in January.

—Elton Elliott

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STATEMENT OF POLICY

Welcome to the new GALAXY.

As you can see from our first issue there've been some changes made. And there is more coming.

Science fiction itself has been changing the last few years.

The number of science fiction books and movies being released has increased dramatically.

Hundreds of science fiction books are scheduled for release in the next twelve months alone.

You'll find a probing series of interviews with the stars and directors responsible for some of today's new science fiction movies, and behind the scenes articles on how these movies are made, as well as conversations with luminaries in the fields of science and literature.

The new GALAXY will help keep you abreast of all this every issue with news of forthcoming projects in both media from our *SF Hotline* correspondents.

The increasing rate of change in our lives, the result of industrialization, has focused people's attention on the scientific horizon which may effect us all.

You'll find this interest reflected in more articles we will be developing, rounding-up current breakthroughs in chemistry, biology and physics, by science writer Greg Chalfin, as well as reports on similiar breakthroughs in the scientific investigation of psychic phenomenon by former NASA engineer, Jim Beal.

Also coming in the escape world of fantasy is a new series of illustrated graphic stories with scripts by some of the biggest names in science fiction and artwork by some of the finest artists in the comic field.

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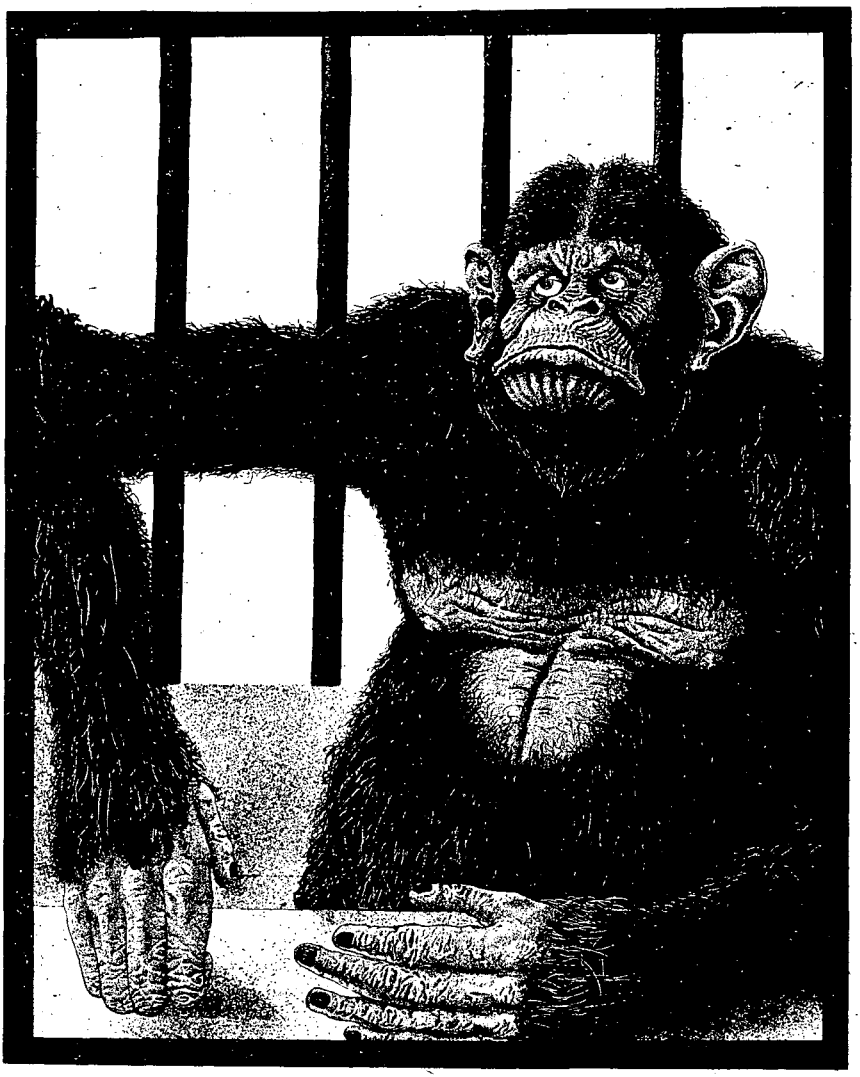

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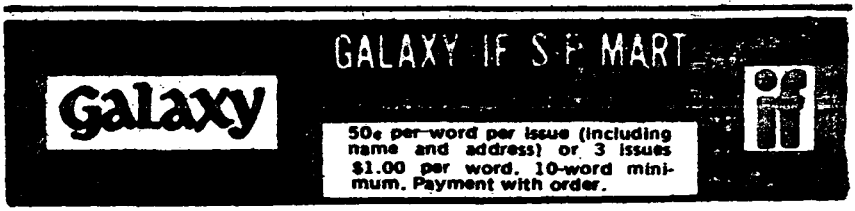
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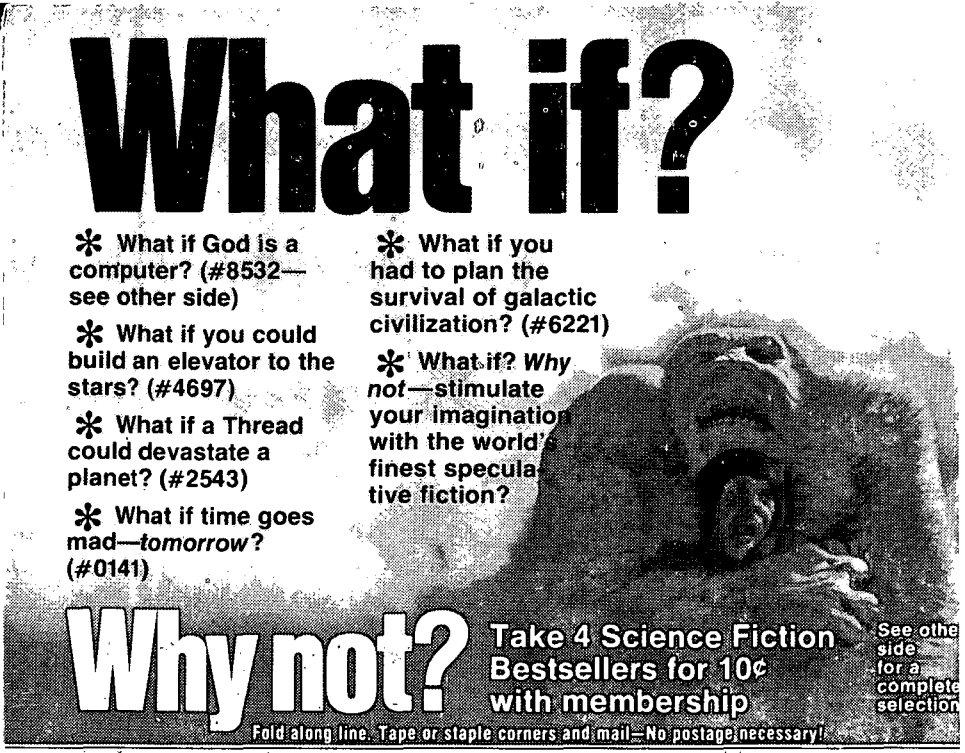

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